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Study, practice, and pedagogy of idea formation in rhetoric and professional communication

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**Study, practice, and pedagogy of idea formation
in rhetoric and professional communication**

by

Iraj Omidvar

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Rhetoric and Professional Communication

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For the Major Program

for

Maryam, Parviz,

Anne,

Annie, and Danny

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ABSTRACT

The collapse of traditional epistemology, which began in the eighteenth century in Europe, has removed many of the traditional distinctions between philosophy and rhetoric and has significantly expanded the scope of the latter. This dissertation explores aspects of the new definition of rhetoric that emerges from this collapse. The new definition emphasizes how we form ideas (decisions, judgments, theories, but also names and images) by communicating as we work together to solve problems and to decide courses of action by examining social/cultural, institutional, and individual values. “How Professionals Form Their Ideas: An Urgent Research Direction for Rhetoric and Professional Communication” argues that the shift in the definition of rhetoric invites the discipline of professional communication to study how professionals arrive at their ideas, instead of how professionals communicate once they have formed their ideas. Noting the growing influence of professionals and the shrinking public sphere, the paper argues that this research direction should be prioritized. “Limits of Countering Stereotypes Through the Use of Visual Rhetoric: A Study of Photographs of Iran” studies how stereotypes—a specific type of idea—are formed and explores ways of countering the effects and processes of stereotyping in ways that do not merely attempt to reverse those effects and processes. “Revisiting the Poststructuralist Turn in Critical Pedagogy” argues that the poststructuralist inflections of critical pedagogy have introduced elements of objectivism into critical pedagogy, which despite its roots in nineteenth century philosophy is much more in keeping with the shift in the definition of rhetoric than what poststructuralism has to offer.

CHAPTER 1. DISSERTATION INTRODUCTION

Introduction

This dissertation consists of three articles that are being prepared for publication. In addition to presenting an outline of the three articles, this introduction offers an explanation of (a) what topics I am studying and in what ways they are linked, (b) why I am studying those topics, and (c) what theorists have helped me frame and direct my studies.

What connects the three articles in this dissertation and what constitutes the heart of my scholarly interests are issues of justice and freedom. But of course those issues are closely connected to how ideas are formed and how the quality of this formation can be improved. For example, to be able to say that a given condition in which certain people find themselves is oppressive requires knowledge of a wide range of other issues related to how ideas are formed: How do I arrive at my judgment? What standards and norms do I use for my judgment? How do I arrive at my norms and standards? How did that condition come about? How do the creators of that condition explain it? Do the people I consider oppressed agree with my judgment? If they do not, is it possible (or under what conditions is it possible) to say the oppressed are systematically mistaken about their condition? The same question can also be asked of members of some oppressive government who refuse to acknowledge that they are oppressing a group of people. And how do people who hold

grudges against one another (say, the oppressed and the oppressor) ever resolve their differences? Through what type of communication? For me these questions are not mere intellectual puzzles. I lived through the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, and I have first-hand knowledge of the atrocities that can be committed when social arrangements and activities and thinking habits of people are not conducive to the formation of moderately good ideas.

In the academy, my first extended and methodical attempt to understand how ideas are formed was in the context of writing my M.A. thesis, where I examined several rhetoric textbooks and argued that our most widely used model of critical thinking and rhetoric taught in first-year composition classes remains completely vulnerable to the intrusion of gross forms of prejudice. I called that model the *institutional definition of critical thinking* (IDCT). I argued that IDCT, at best, teaches what philosophers call instrumental rationality, which concerns itself with finding the best means of arriving at predetermined ends. I examined some of the most salient characteristics and implications of IDCT. Using critiques of two important feminist epistemologists (Sandra Harding and Elisabeth Lloyd), I noted that IDCT excludes the possibility of the rational consideration of what traditional philosophy calls “values” and has strong suspicions of the place and function of emotions in thinking. I traced the historical roots of instrumental rationality and its closely related concept of objectivism to ancient Greece and in particular to Plato’s and Aristotle’s metaphysical and epistemological project (henceforth *master tradition*), a project that over the centuries, but especially since the middle of the nineteenth century, has collapsed. Since all articles in this dissertation wrestle—one way or another—with the implications of the collapse of the master tradition, in the following subsection, I will outline my key findings about that framework.

The Master Tradition and Its Influence

Plato and Aristotle stand out in the history of thought because of their tremendous influence on subsequent thinkers. In this subsection, I will explain some of the implications of the master tradition for knowledge and oppression. When discussing the master tradition, I will focus on the Aristotelian version for two reasons. First, Renaissance and Enlightenment, out of which modern philosophy developed, came out of an Aristotelian version of the master tradition (Marias, 167). And, second, Aristotle as the founder of the science of logic (see for example Marias, 74) provided not only theoretical justifications for his epistemology but also a widely used methodology that contributed greatly to the adoption of his ideas.

I began my studies by asking Aristotle, this founder of the science of logic, to explain his justifications for his frank endorsement of various forms of oppression. In *Politics*, Aristotle writes,

Tame animals are by nature better than wild, and it is better for them all to be ruled by men, because it secures their safety. Again, as between male and female the former is by nature superior and ruler, the latter inferior and subject. And this must hold good of mankind in general. (68)

What Aristotle means by “nature” is part of his general description of the nature of the world and reality and is a very complex concept because this nature has something to do with rationality itself (Charles, 54). He believed that everything in the world consists of an elaborate hierarchy of matter and form (or essence). At one end of the hierarchy is prime matter (O’Conner, 50), which is indefinite and “entirely featureless and structureless.” Unlike Plato, Aristotle thought both form (essence or idea) and matter are real and together they

constitute the substance of a thing. Aristotle considered the relationship between form and matter also in terms of processes to account for change (O'Connor, 51). As processes, matter has the potential to be actualized or formed as the acorn has the potential to actualize into an oak. Potentiality is a purpose built into all matter. The world is slowly forming and becoming what it is designed for. The main process by which matter is formed is the final cause. For example, the final cause of a house would be its purpose, providing shelter and comfort. This concept in turn leads to the concept of god, which is all form and the form, purpose, and cause (final) of the world.

When it comes to living beings, the concepts of matter and form become body and soul. By *soul* Aristotle means the body's "nature, organization, and manner of working" (O'Connor, 52). Different living beings have different types of souls on a hierarchical ladder: plant souls have nutritive and reproductive abilities (faculties); animal souls have in addition sensitive (tactile), "instinctive desire," and locomotive abilities; humans have in addition a rational ability (52). In the human soul there is, as well, a hierarchy of form and matter: the vegetative, emotional, and rational faculties, the rational part being what he called the mind.

Contrary to what one might expect, Aristotle's epistemology does not underpin his metaphysical claims about the world; rather it is the other way round: his metaphysics underpins his epistemology (Charles, 55). For Aristotle, knowledge is not a product of mental activity along the lines of, say, representation of what is real out there in the world. Aristotle believed form and matter were both real; and he believed that matter, which is a changing potentiality (incomplete and indefinite) cannot be comprehended (Dewey, 85). So

what can be known is the form or essence, which is delimited, at rest, and unmixed with other things.

His system allowed for two main ways of knowing: indirectly through definitions or directly through intuitive grasp (51, O'Connor; Book 1, 31, *Open Society*). Scientific demonstration aims to describe or define the essence through a process of reasoning Aristotle called syllogism (Popper, Book 1, 31); but, technically, knowledge itself is an intellectual intuition (grasp) of essences. Ultimately, knowledge for Aristotle is intuition since both the starting point of the chain of reasoning in syllogisms (Woozley, 452) and the conclusions of demonstrations (definitions) are grasped intuitively (Dewey, 88).

Aristotle's epistemology and metaphysics provide a comprehensive early formulation of objectivism since there is no point in separating causality in the world from rationality of minds. Mind is the faculty of the soul that is in touch with or intuits the essences of things. Causality and rationality, cause and reason, coincide.

To appreciate Aristotle's justifications for oppression, and the complexity of the task facing, for example, feminist philosophers in trying to formulate alternative philosophies of knowledge and justice, several important characteristics of his philosophy should be highlighted.

For Aristotle, form is "better" (Russell, 176) than matter because as Louis Ropes Loomis in *Aristotle On Man in the Universe* writes, "form in nature is what gives pattern and character to everything" (xxiii). And the world is on a hierarchy or evolutionary ladder of form and matter. The attribution of value or purpose to nature has two important implications. First, it explained the "intelligibility of nature and the possibility of science," and, second, it "gave sanction and worth to the moral and religious endeavors of man"

(Dewey, *Influence*, 309). In other words, what is truly good is determined by *nature*, the order and structure of the world, not what people merely think is good.

The relationship between form and matter is also one of rule and domination.

Aristotle writes, “In *all* cases where there is a compound . . . a ruling element and a ruled can always be traced. This characteristic . . . is present in animate beings by virtue of the whole constitution of nature, inanimate as well as animate” (Barker’s *Politics* 12). Since *substance* is a compound of form and matter, Aristotle is covering all of reality (except prime matter and God). Examples of ruler/ruled relationships Aristotle gives in his works are man/woman, soul/body, mind/soul, man/animal, Greek/barbarian, and father/child (see also Saunders, 66). The idea of the rule of form implies that matter *resists* form. Thus not only the good ends towards which reality strives but also instances of decay can be explained. For example, according to Aristotle, the difference between a boy and a man is that “A boy is like a woman in form” and “the woman is as it were an impotent male, for it is through a certain incapacity that the female is female” (268, *Metaphysics*, in Ross’s translation).

Aristotle’s characterization of slavery can be summarized as follows. The principle of “rule and subordination in nature at large” (Barker, 11) can be seen in the relationship between soul and the body and between the mind and the soul. In all cases, the part that is more formed (13) should rule. The same principle justifies the natural master to rule the natural slave (11). The principle is strict, for, as Aristotle says, people are “marked, immediately at birth” to rule or to be ruled, and this state of affairs is both “necessary” and “expedient” (12, Barker’s translation). According to Aristotle, the slave and the master have to be slave and master *by nature*. And what makes a person a natural master is—of all things—*rationality* because the natural master “possesses the rational faculty of the soul”

(Barker, 11). What goes for masters and slaves also goes for men and women: “The slave is entirely without the faculty of deliberation; the female indeed possesses it, but in a form which remains inconclusive” (35). A rational person grasps (intuits) the actual nature of the world, which is the hierarchical rule of form over matter, and reason is able to explain why this domination occurs, why it is good.

Current Research Directions

One of the many issues I discovered by studying Aristotle was that contemporary attempts to use Aristotle’s rhetoric should be made with great caution because for Aristotle rhetoric is not designed to teach a theory about discovering socially mediated, reliable knowledge: that goal is not part of rhetoric’s problematics. *On Rhetoric* was written for students and readers who were expected to have understood many other subjects explained elsewhere in his works, since in *On Rhetoric* issues of justice, reasoning, women, slavery, the demos, democracies, etc. are all in the background. Several of his key works are actually named in the text; there are frequent references to concepts, definitions, and discussions elaborated in other works; and—even without such references—those concepts are embedded in the theoretical definitions and divisions of rhetoric (e.g., emotional appeals are directed to the emotional faculty of the soul). Thus when Aristotle writes, “rhetoric is an offshoot” (154, translated by W. Rhys Roberts in *The Rhetorical Tradition*) of ethical and political studies, this does not mean that rhetoric is a tool for understanding ethical and political subjects. Rather it is designed to teach his students knowledge for solving a very specific problem: how to deal with the “ordinary people” in public places of Athens (Brunschwig, 51), whom

Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics* complains of being impervious to argument because of their penchant for living “by their feelings” (1179b 9-18, Terence Irwin’s translation).

Towards the end of my thesis research, I also realized that the assumptions and justifications of the master tradition have completely unraveled since the middle of the nineteenth century. That unraveling has had far-reaching consequences for how knowledge production and communication can be theorized because the master tradition was a lived theoretical framework. In other words, many of its arguments, being deeply embedded in the assumptions of Western societies, are invisible. And I realized that the task of contemporary philosophers and rhetoricians is much greater than at least most rhetoricians I have studied in my doctoral program seem to appreciate. The collapse of the master tradition opens unnervingly vast vistas, many of which lead to little-traveled paths. For example, the collapse results in the erosion of the traditional distinction between philosophy and rhetoric, a distinction that seems to worsen an already sharp distinction between the premises of social constructionism and the idea of rationality. And a great deal of definitional work has to go into what exactly rhetoric means if the master tradition is rejected, since the definitions that categorized rhetoric (often in relation to philosophy) assume the master tradition as their frame of reference. What scholars of communication and idea formation face is nothing less than trying to take in the full scope of the ruined edifice of the master tradition (and its Aristotelian theology) and to see if we can clear our minds of it in order to have a chance at re-envisioning the whole field of human communication and reasoning.

Since communication and formation of ideas (decisions, judgments, etc.) bear directly on questions of justice and oppression, I have been particularly interested in reconceptualizing rhetoric, especially as it relates to justice, while avoiding positivism and

extreme versions of social constructionism. Of particular concern to me is the reduction of questions regarding justice to opinion and power. That reduction dramatically affects our conceptions of rhetoric, pedagogy, research, ethics, and politics. So I have been examining the historical and conceptual frameworks producing that reduction.

I have looked for alternative perspectives on rhetoric that go beyond its traditional topics (audience, context, purpose, logos, ethos, pathos, etc.) to include wider fields such as how we come up with the standards (values) for accepting or rejecting ideas, how we are socialized (that is, implicitly, through ideology or hegemony) or educated (that is, explicitly, through formal instruction) to accept certain ideas, how we understand and categorize our qualitative states (affects, feelings, desires, emotions, sensations, passions, sentiments, drives, impulses, etc.). And I have been exploring models of communication that do not arbitrarily focus on one small aspect (e.g., advocacy) or one type (e.g., extreme top-down communication such as that between teacher and student in some traditional classrooms, preacher and congregation, administrator and administrated, and commercial broadcaster and TV-viewer). I have looked at, and would like to study more, models like committees and meetings, in which people supposedly at the receiving end of communication are not completely passive or absent. Other models are communication in assemblies (e.g., Congress, city-hall meetings), courtroom communication (the area of interest for Perelman and Toulmin), scientific communication (Latour), and, I would argue, professional communication among professionals.

In pursuit of alternative perspectives on rhetoric, I have focused on texts in philosophy because much of the debate about sociology of knowledge, of which social constructionism in rhetoric is a specialized current, has been taking place outside

professional communication. To answer the most basic questions about the presence of injustice in a social context requires an examination of a wide array of issues including social constructionist ones (Are people's ideas completely determined by their social condition? Can people be systematically deluded about the justice or injustice of their situation?). Moreover, since one of the implications of the erosion of the rhetoric/philosophy distinction expands the scope of rhetoric's concerns to include idea formation, studying traditional philosophy becomes necessary since idea formation has been a concern of traditional philosophy. More specifically, what traditional philosophy calls value judgments becomes important; thus insights from ethics, politics, and aesthetics become relevant to the expanded field of rhetoric.

As the articles in this dissertation argue in different contexts, the collapse of the master tradition expands the field of rhetoric to recognize that knowledge is produced (1) communally and through communication in the context of collaborative activity, (2) through a process of searching (inquiry), which at every step involves value judgments, and (3) through critical interpretations by agents at several levels: culture-wide values of society, institutional values, and values of agents/subjects. A great deal of work has been done on these issues by a wide range of theorists. But the alternative perspectives I am interested in also try to address the issue of how judgments of value are in fact formed (interpretation of signs in hermeneutics, theory choice in science) within different discourse communities. This interest requires close examination of a set of related issues: what organizational structures, approaches to inquiry, activity procedures, etc. lend themselves to the formation of optimal ideas that achieve/transform the aims of the community while representing good policies for the agent and the broader public. These issues are pivotal to professional communication

since professionals justify their value to society by claiming possession of specialized bodies of knowledge. Since this possession is a defining characteristic of professionals, I am interested in critically scrutinizing their work in the same way that sociologists of knowledge have scrutinized the work of engineers and scientists.

Compared with the traditional framework of rhetoric, the alternative perspectives I am interested in are new and riddled with problems and complexities that need to be explored. The articles in the dissertation explore various aspects of those complexities. For example, in one article I take seriously the claim of sociology of knowledge (and of rhetoric of inquiry) that knowledge is produced communally but argue further that rhetoricians should also consider the work of professionals as involving knowledge production through communication and should explore the conditions that are conducive to the formation of good ideas in professions. In another article, I attempt to examine and argue against some of what I consider to be unwarranted conclusions that certain theorists attribute to sociology of knowledge. In particular some versions of poststructuralism seem to subscribe to the very objectivist assumptions they aim to refute. They assume objective knowledge to be certain and a-perspectival, and because they find such knowledge to be impossible, they announce that objective knowledge cannot be obtained. These claims, of course, also do away with the reliability of any claims made by the oppressed regarding the objectivity (reality) of their suffering.

Review of Significant Literature

According to the framework emerging from the gradual shift in the western intellectual tradition, knowledge and language are accompaniments and products of activity. In the tradition of analytic philosophy, Ludwig Wittgenstein writes that “the speaking of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life” (1107). In that of continental philosophy, Friedrich Nietzsche argues somewhat dramatically for a philosophy of life in which “truth [is] the illusion that helps us cope with life” (Safranski, 349). Karl Marx’s notion of praxis—“what else is life but activity” (315)—has perhaps been the best known example of this shift. According to this view, knowledge is not merely passive contemplation/interpretation of reality but is produced through interaction with (and transformation of) reality. Later views reflecting this shift can be seen in the works of American pragmatists, and more recently in continental philosophy in that of Martin Heidegger, for whom certain types of knowledge of things for humans already in the world comes from the use of those things in activities (99). These views have been expounded more recently in Foucault’s writings on discursive practices and Habermas’s on communicative action, and in Bourdieu’s theories of practical reason and action, John Searle’s expansion of speech act theory to rationality in action, and the work of feminist philosophers of science such as Helen Longino, Sandra Harding, and Donna Haraway.

All along I have been interested in understanding the implications of these alternative models for research, pedagogy, and politics. Thus my papers touch on or explicitly explore the points of contact between this emerging view in philosophy and professional communication, critical pedagogy, and visual rhetoric. Because the emerging models

emphasize the social character of knowledge production, I have been interested in examining social arrangements that help or hinder the formation of good ideas. For example, some of the most important decisions in countries like the United States are made by professionals, and I am interested in examining social arrangements designed to channel or to facilitate collective decisions making.

Below is a guide to the topics and thinkers whose works either frame my arguments or are scrutinized in the dissertation. I organize this review according to the three characteristics of the alternative perspectives (see above) that I am exploring:

- Knowledge is produced communally and through communication in the context of collaborative activity:
 - (Neo)-pragmatism (Peirce, Dewey, Rorty, Herstein Smith), activity theory (Vygotsky), hermeneutics of Heidegger, language games of Wittgenstein, speech act theory of Searle, and Habermass's theory of communicative action;
 - Sociology of knowledge (theories of knowledge, social constructionism, rhetoric of inquiry) including texts of/on classical and cultural marxism (in various manifestations, for example, poststructuralism);
 - Dialogue and conversation (Rorty, Bakhtin, Vygotsky, Mendelson); and
 - History and theory of rhetoric.
- Knowledge is produced through a process of searching (inquiry), which at every step involves value judgments:
 - Philosophy of (social) science (Fay, Coser, Trigg, readings in philosophy of science) including theories of knowledge (Aristotle, feminist epistemologies, cultural studies articulation theory);

- Research methodologies of social sciences (especially qualitative research);
 - Pragmatism (Dewey and Booth), Isocratic and Protagorean philosophies (in general, Sophistic philosophies, Consigny and Mendelson);
 - Theories of ethics, politics, and aesthetics; and
 - Rationality and value judgments (the question of truth, philosophical hermeneutics, and theory choice) including discussions of the fact/value dichotomy.
- Knowledge is produced through critical interpretations by agents at several levels:
 - Embedded culture-wide pre-conceptions as the common ground of activity (propaganda and socialization). Questions of
 - Ideology (hegemony) in Marxism, feminism, and postcolonial and cultural studies,
 - Tradition in hermeneutics,
 - Background in speech act theory, and
 - Conceptual schemes in cognitive psychology;
 - Institutional (discourse/disciplinary/professional community) values (Nietzsche, Foucault, texts on sociology of knowledge and social constructionism, language and signifying practices in anthropology and qualitative research, and rhetoric of inquiry, discussions of professional communication and professionalism); and

- Interaction of the subjects/identities with institutional and culture-wide values (critical theory and pedagogy, multiculturalism, cultural studies, autocritography, student-curriculum debates) including discussions/definitions of the subject and of identity (feminism, cultural studies, Marxism, etc.).

Article Outlines

Article 1—Professional Communication and Idea Formation

In “How Professionals Form Their Ideas: An Urgent Research Direction for Rhetoric and Professional Communication,” I argue that a major line of inquiry in rhetoric and professional communication should be how ideas are formed in professions. The paper has five parts. First, to formulate a clear definition of professions, I examine a recent article in the *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* which concerns itself with a historical survey of the definitions of professionalism and professional communication in the journals of our discipline. Second, I argue that the Aristotelian conceptualization of rhetoric as what Perelman calls “advocacy” or persuasive communication of already formed ideas is no longer tenable because Aristotle’s extra-rhetorical methodology for arriving at knowledge has been discredited. Rather, the new conceptualization of rhetoric recognizes that knowledge is arrived at through communicative social interaction in the process of communal activity. In the new conceptualization, discovery and invention are foregrounded. Thus, as a discipline, rhetoric should be attentive to how ideas are formed in a given context. And as pedagogy it should aim to do what Isocrates held up as the goal of his educational philosophy: teaching students how to examine the context in order to arrive at sound judgments and to give good

advice. Third, I explain what I mean by studying idea formation in professional communication and why I think it is important that this line of inquiry be taken up with more diligence in RPC. Fourth, I offer an informal example of a professional environment I once worked in to indicate what kind of questions the type of inquiry I propose would give rise to. Finally, I offer a list of professional settings in which this type of inquiry can be conducted.

In this article, my concern is to show that professions justify their special privileges and powers in society by monopolizing certain types of knowledge; they are handlers and creators of knowledge (what counts as good ideas). In fact, what they do is similar to what scientists do. For the same reasons that knowledge production in the community of scientists and engineers has been scrutinized by rhetoricians of inquiry and sociologists of knowledge (including feminists), professional communication scholars should study not just how professionals communicate their already formed ideas for lay audiences but how they form their ideas in general. I also argue that this research direction has important consequences for our understanding of the possibility of democracy for a society in which the public sphere rapidly is being ceded to experts and professionals.

This article will be submitted to *POROI*, a peer-reviewed, on-line journal.

Article 2: Visual Rhetoric and Stereotypes

In “Limits of Countering Stereotypes Through the Use of Visual Rhetoric: A Study of Photographs of Iran,” I explore the scope for countering stereotypes by the use of photos and other still images. The dangers of the post-9/11 world prompted me to consider my options for trying to counter stereotypes of Iranians. It seems less likely now that Iran may be invaded by the United States. But in 2002, the likelihood seemed great. And my family

and I observed with growing concern the dehumanizing stereotypes of Middle Easterners, Arabs, and Iranians increasingly used by the media and political leaders. Around that time, I accepted to speak publicly about Iran. And I began preparing a one-hour computer presentation for that purpose. In the presentation, I decided to use many photographs and maps to make the presentation visually more intensive. But as time progressed, I became more and more concerned about certain ethical considerations involved in making such a presentation, especially about the use of photographs. In fall of 2003, I presented “Representing Iran: The Pitfalls of Countering Stereotypes Through Image and Word” at The Power and Persistence of Stereotyping Conference held at Universidade de Aveiro, Portugal. At the conference, I became acquainted with fascinating explorations of the concept of “stereotype,” explorations that added to my understanding of the complexities involved in countering stereotypes. My article is in part based on my presentation in Portugal and what I learned there. The article uses some of Plato’s ideas to explore the complexities I encountered when I was working on my presentation. Over time, I have come to appreciate the difference between Plato’s playful handling of ideas (or his focus on the practice of philosophy) and various forms of Platonisms. In some interpretations of Plato, Plato’s dialogues show him to be struggling to formulate and to resolve various problems. Usually he is not entirely successful, but he proposes various solutions and explores them. Unfortunately, often those tentative solutions have been adopted and presented as rigid doctrines by later thinkers. Although I still think much of what Karl Popper says about strong undercurrents of authoritarian thought present in the dialogues to be Plato’s, Plato, now it seems to me, has the redeeming quality of struggling with those thought patterns, something that many of his Platonist followers lacked. At any rate, I have come to consider

the possibility that Plato did have a core set of legitimate concerns about the difference between what seems to be true and what is true. Of course, my acceptance of Plato's identification of the problems of deception in discourse and of mistakes in inquiry do not commit me to his tentative yet rather grand solutions: his postulating the existence of the real world of ideas as opposed to the phenomenal world of the senses, the tripartite nature of the soul, and all the rest of it. But seeing Plato as someone who was not as concerned with the doctrines that he examined as he was with enacting and living philosophy offers important insights. In this re-interpretation of Plato, it turns out that it was through the practice of philosophy that, he believed, he could get a glimpse of knowledge. In this context, there is an interesting parallel between what he says about painting and what he says about philosophizing. In some passages in his works, Plato seems to be saying that a painter who paints, say, a rein does not really know it. Only riders know what reins are because they use reins in their activities and handle and see them in relation to other things. For Plato, his ideas (thoughts) are like the reins; he has to use them, connect them with other ideas, test them in dialogues, as well as live them physically or vicariously, again, through dialogues to see if they stretch or break or can be used; that in other words, is how he knows. I argue in my essay that a flexible handling of this insight can help highlight certain problems associated with idea formation in general and visual representations with photographs in particular. What does it mean to accompany a news report of Iran's nuclear activities with a photograph of the inside of a nuclear power plant? Or when a report of a demonstration of women in Iran is accompanied by a photograph of a woman wearing the *hejab*? The essay argues that perhaps the only effective role static visual representations can have in countering stereotypes is disruption. They can have a destructive, not a constructive role, in countering

stereotypes. To use a Platonic framework, visuals can be used like Socratic *elenchos* aimed at dislodging the prejudgments of the conversation partner. The goal of the *elenchos* would not be to arrive at knowledge, but at an *aporia*, a crisis, and perhaps some advice about possible paths to further inquiry.

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Article 3—Poststructuralism and Critical Pedagogy

In “Revisiting the Poststructuralist Turn in Critical Pedagogy,” I argue that (a) lack of appreciation for the concept of praxis in critical pedagogy and (b) underlying objectivist tendencies in certain articulations of poststructuralism have tended to undermine the very motivating impulse behind critical pedagogy in composition studies. In this essay I first look at formulations of the project of critical pedagogy by Paulo Freire and Ira Shor and then show how those early formulations have been inflected by the poststructuralist turn in composition studies. I will argue—whatever the problems of the original formulations of critical pedagogy—that the poststructuralist inflections have had the disastrous consequence of eroding the meanings of terms such as *oppression*, *liberation*, and *justice*. To understand the sources of this erosion (and whether there is any justification for it), I look at some manifestations of a loose collection of ideas that is often referred to as postmodernism. I outline some of the relevant articulations of this collection of ideas. Then I examine and at some length respond to two of the better known proponents of the view. First, I examine the

work of Stuart Hall, a leading figure in cultural studies. Hall openly declares that he believes the connection between the discursive and the extradiscursive to have the status of a wager, that is, the status of an interesting but ultimately unimportant side issue that should not concern thinkers. In response, I analyze parts of his influential cultural studies textbook, in which he tries to detail how he arrives at some of his most far-reaching conclusions. I try to show that Hall's arguments are untenable because his theory of representation adopts a theory of signs that in effect rejects the very possibility of signification. Because of the influence of Stanley Fish on English studies, I look at his definition of rhetoric as "passionate partisan discourse" and his attack on the concepts of truth and objectivity. The implications of these arguments for critical pedagogy are rather obvious. The starting point for critical pedagogues is their recognition that some people in society or across societies are being oppressed and exploited. These pedagogues do not believe that they are mistaken in their beliefs or that although they are correct in their beliefs, those who exploit and oppress people are *equally correct* in their beliefs for thinking that they are doing the exploited a favor. I try to show that Fish is wrong about his most ambitious claims at several levels. In the last part of the essay, I argue that these implausible views (and the many—systematic—misunderstandings of the views of thinkers such as Nietzsche, Foucault, Kuhn, and De Saussure) come from a failure to appreciate some of the many wide-ranging implications of the most important shift in the history of philosophy, from a static view of knowledge to a dynamic one that foregrounds human life and action.

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CHAPTER 2. HOW PROFESSIONALS FORM THEIR IDEAS: AN URGENT RESEARCH DIRECTION FOR RHETORIC AND PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION

To be submitted to *POROI (Project on Rhetoric of Inquiry)*

Iraj Omidvar

Abstract

In this paper I argue that a major line of inquiry in rhetoric and professional communication should be how ideas are formed in professions. The paper examines a recent comprehensive survey of the definitions of professionalism and professional communication in technical and professional communication articles in order to show that a key defining characteristic of professions is their ability to control the production and application of ideas. Since the assumptions underlying Aristotle's characterization of rhetoric as "advocacy" or persuasive communication of already formed ideas are thoroughly rejected in contemporary thought, the paper argues for a definition of rhetoric in professional communication that recognizes the social, communicative, and activity-based character of knowledge and foregrounds discovery and invention. This definition significantly expands the range of issues with which professional communication scholars have concerned themselves—how

well professionals communicate their already formed ideas—to include issues related to how ideas are produced and applied in professions. The growing professionalization of society and the shrinking public sphere should serve as strong motivators for rhetoricians to take up this expanded research direction.

Introduction

In this paper I argue that a major line of inquiry in rhetoric and professional communication (RPC) should be how ideas are formed in professions. This paper has five parts. First, to formulate a clear definition of *professions*, I examine a recent article in the *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* that concerns itself with defining *professionalism* and *professional communication*. Second, I argue that the Aristotelian conceptualization of rhetoric as what Perelman calls “advocacy” or persuasive communication of already formed ideas is no longer tenable because Aristotle’s extra-rhetorical methodology for arriving at knowledge has been discredited. Rather, the new conceptualization of rhetoric recognizes that knowledge is arrived at through communicative social interaction in the process of communal activity. In the new conceptualization, discovery and invention are foregrounded. Thus, as a discipline, rhetoric should be attentive to how ideas are formed in a given context. And as pedagogy, it should aim to teach students how to examine the context in order to arrive at sound judgments and to give good advice. Third, I explain what I mean by studying idea formation in professional communication and why I think it is important that this line of inquiry be taken up with more diligence in RPC. Fourth, I offer as a very informal example a professional environment in which I once worked, to indicate what kind of questions the type of inquiry I propose would inevitably

give rise to. Finally, I offer a list of professional settings in which this type of inquiry can be conducted.

Profession and Professional in Professional Communication

In “Professional Identities: What Is Professional about Professional Communication?” published in the July 2002 issue of *JBTC*, Brenton Faber, while attempting to define *professional communication* (PC), offers an extremely useful and long-overdue review of literature in our discipline. He aims specifically to differentiate PC from “service learning, workplace writing, online communication, and other forms of occupational communication” (306), thereby rejecting both overly broad definitions of professional communication, e.g., as communication to bring about some end beyond the experience of discourse, and overly narrow definitions, e.g., communication directed “to and from a group” (311). Such definitions, he writes, not only do not distinguish PC from other occupational communication, but they do not help us see the individual communicator’s position “within a social or cultural context” (310-311). I contend that although (a) Faber’s preliminary justifications for narrowing the scope of the definition of *professions* are inadequate (b) his later review of articles that look at how professions themselves attempt to and in fact do establish their professionalism through communication practice permits a much broader definition.

Faber narrows the term *professional* to refer to what “literature on the professions [refers to] as professional guilds: doctors; lawyers (not in-house corporate lawyers); clergy; university professors; and, in a negative example of a deprofessionalized group, teachers” (309). This narrowing is justified, Faber writes, because professions were developed to

provide vital services “*as an occupational sector separate from government and capitalism*” (309). The goal of professions, though profitable, is “not to maximize profit but address the needs of people who *require services* that are essential to their well-being” (309). By limiting himself to professional guilds, he excludes several professions associated with PC: “bankers, engineers, accountants, or administrators who supervise professionals” (309) because these are “*employees of capitalism . . . who broker between the interests of capital (revenue generation and economic efficiency) and the provision of services*” (309). Moreover, these groups do not “come together as political entities, they do not have *central associations* (e.g., the American Medical Association), they do not control their occupational space, and their projects, employment, and quality control are subject to capitalist oversight” (309).

I believe that this narrowing of the definition is unjustified, for several reasons. First, the groups excluded are political entities and have central associations. Bankers have, for example, the American Bankers Association; engineers have dozens of associations; accountants have the American Accounting Association; and administrators have the American Society of Public Administrators and the American Management Association. Moreover, these associations come together as political entities. For example, the Web site of the American Bankers Association lists a number of its public advocacy successes in changing federal laws. The influence of engineering as a profession on national legislation should need no exposition. Engineers do not really have to seek the law, for the law itself has a direct interest in the activities of engineers. Activities of groups such as architects and engineers are considered so vital—and so potentially dangerous—that state governments have a hand in their education, certification, and continued supervision.

Second, I see no reason why workers in corporations or governments should be disqualified as professionals. For one thing, many workers (including physicians in private hospitals and clinics, lawyers in large private firms, and a great many professors in four-year colleges) acknowledged as professionals by Faber work *for* corporations. For another thing, corporations can be looked at as organizations dedicated to wealth production, but they don't print money; they can also be looked at as organizations that offer products and services, and some of those products and services are definitely "essential to . . . [people's] well-being" (309). It is true that professionals working for corporations may have limited control over "occupational space, and their projects, employment, and quality control" (309). But perhaps those are conditions under which some of the professionals Faber recognizes also work. Iowa State University's Human Resource Services list of available professional and scientific jobs (as of 2/28/03) was as follows: accountant, administrative specialist, programmer, systems analyst, assistant director, program coordinator, project manager, director, engineer, program specialist, manager, program assistant, research associate, psychologist.¹ Faber's definition will permit PC to study only the communicational activities of the psychologist. I believe Faber's preliminary definition is too narrow.

A more useful approach to defining professions would take into account the radical division of labor in industrial societies. In *Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith explains that industrialization is a process in which complex tasks are broken down into extremely simple ones so that either workers or machines can do those simple and repetitive tasks; the product will be put together later in small steps by successive groups of people who handle the progressively more-processed materials given to them by earlier sets of workers and

¹ <http://www.hrs.iastate.edu/jobs/jobs.html>

machines (9-18). The goal is to produce more (productivity) through simplifying and streamlining the production steps (efficiency). In this arrangement, some people have to be willing to do the boring, repetitive—and thus physically straining and difficult—unsatisfying, demoralizing work. These low-skill workers usually do not have to make vital decisions about the processes of which they are a part. The work they do individually is not valuable, and they can be replaced. (Despite all the fashionable drone about the wonders of our being in a post-industrial, information-intensive society, most products we use continue to be manufactured through the dehumanizing processes of the radical industrial division of labor.)

Another side of this arrangement, however, is greater and greater specialization of tasks. If the factory is making an automobile, there will be several production units: a few design units, a few engineering units, the seat assembly unit, the engine assembly unit, etc. The engine assembly unit may need to assemble a thousand parts, so there will be sub-units, with workers and specialists in each group. The people who do the repetitive tasks cannot see the broader picture. They do not see which work has to be done before other works; a specialist manager does that. Another specialist will have to standardize tools. Because some specialist manager may be too busy to deal with employees directly, a human-relations specialist does that job.

Manufacturing constantly spins off specialized production units, a great many of which leave the manufacturing plant and create their own manufacturing plants. According to Karl Marx, (cf. *Capital*, Volume 1, 455-491), this pattern eventually—as in our post-industrial, information society—leads to a “social division of labor” (475). As instruments of labor become specialized (differentiated), “the trades which produce these instruments themselves become more and more differentiated” (473). Marx writes that if values other

than wealth production are not taken extremely seriously—as happens in the United States—then capitalism and its industrial needs “will turn the whole of society into a factory” (477). The self-replicating pattern is simple. Instead of guilds of skilled artisans and craftspeople making a limited number of expensive products, large manufacturing plants consisting of two sets of workers manufacture large quantities of cheap products: The two sets of workers are (1) workers who do mind-numbingly simple, repetitive tasks and (2) specialists, who coordinate, design, make decisions, and solve problems. Group two, which receives education and enjoys a high standard of living, is part of a class that by virtue of its privileges is a *de facto* political elite; since medieval times this group has become progressively more specialized.

Faber’s later review of articles about how professionals included in his tentative definition describe their own communication practices shows that those descriptions support both my expanded definition of professions and my claim that the type of rhetorical study I propose—research into the formulation of ideas—should be undertaken. Faber writes that professional communicators have three characteristics: First, “Professionals typically prepare information for specific, or even individual, audiences (e.g., patients, judges, students, clients)” (313). Second, the work of professionals is “accountable to the larger community and is meaningful if it teaches and informs practice in some way” (313). Third, professionals engage in “a self-conscious discourse about values, conduct, and what is perceived to be proper action” (314). In the context of the third characteristic, Faber repeatedly suggests that *professionals* have a great deal in common with *experts*. He writes, “professionals are specialists whose principal occupational responsibility addresses ethical and political issues, they create for themselves ethical identities that enable them to be

advocates for specific social causes and social actions” (314). Their need to advocate comes from “*their monopoly position as knowledge specialists*, from sociopolitical activism and struggle, and from their own ideological values” (314). Their credibility comes from the fact that “they position themselves as sole providers of vital, knowledge-based services” (314). They attempt to “control the market for their services by creating a monopoly on their specific forms of knowledge” (315) and by “establishing self-regulating licensing standards, certifications, boards of review, and peer-review processes that preclude nonprofessionals.” Finally, professionals enjoy relatively high social and economic status and “are viewed as knowledge experts” (315).

An outline of the characteristics of professionals that Faber mentions is as follows: professionals do work “that is accountable to the larger community” (313) on “ethical and political issues” (314); have a self-conscious discourse about values and conduct; are knowledge experts who enjoy high social and economic status, who monopolize their position as knowledge specialists by “self-regulating licensing standards, certifications, boards of review, and peer review processes that preclude nonprofessionals” (315), use various forms of instrumental rationality, which helps maintain them as “an elite class” (318).²

This outline is not incompatible with the notion that *professionals are those people doing the thinking part of the intellectual division of labor that goes along with the industrial and social divisions of labor*. Professionals assume positions of authority, leadership, and responsibility; they are educated or well-trained specialists, technocrats (Faber 318), experts,

² Regarding the latter characteristic, Carolyn R. Miller in “The Rhetoric of Decision Science” argues that the dominant model of rationality—“instrumental-technical rationality” (178)—“encourages our submission to technical, knowledge-based solutions for what are social, value-based problems” (179).

social engineers, problem solvers, higher-level thinkers, and decision makers, especially—but not necessarily—in complex institutions or in the context of complex institutional relations. For example, they may be subcontractors of larger corporations or of governments or provide not-for-profit services to people. Notwithstanding Faber’s prohibition, they make decisions and solve problems at the instrumental level, at the level of the rational assessment of values (318), and at the level of policy making. Sometimes they serve under elected political leaders as bureaucrats; sometimes they are professional politicians who work in the complex, long-established, and highly organized institutions of our representative democracy. In short, they include journalists, professors and teachers, medical experts, architects, engineers, lawyers, clergy, police officers, pilots, scientists, bureaucrats, administrators/managers/executive officers, and researchers.

What Should Rhetoric Study?

In the following two sections, I argue that RPC should be concerned primarily with studying idea formation in the professions, as I have defined the term above. A review of key problems with the classical definitions of *rhetoric* shows that the subject matter of rhetoric has not foregrounded the issue of idea formation. The new non-Aristotelian **formulation** of rhetoric sees communication of already formed ideas or Aristotelian rhetoric as a small part of rhetoric. The research direction I propose is an extension of the work being done by feminist philosophers of science and rhetoricians of inquiry. Their insights should serve as a starting guide in RPC research, insights such as value-ladenness of all inquiry, the presence of culture-wide biases, the situated or perspectival nature of inquiry, and the

presence of “perspective limiting hierarchical structure of society” (Harding, “Value Neutrality” 361, 363). I conclude this section by offering a few arguments for the importance of studying idea formation in professions, and I argue that the preliminary value guiding this line of inquiry in the discipline should be an unabashed and genuine commitment to democracy.

Rhetoric as a discipline should be concerned primarily with the formation of ideas through communication, because the classical and traditional justifications for narrowing its scope have been repudiated. Rhetoric has a long history of concerning itself with forceful, effective, or persuasive communication or advocacy of already formed ideas. Richard Whately, who according to Bruce Herzberg and Patricia Bizzell believed that Aristotle’s theory of rhetoric “has never been superseded” (1000), makes a sharp distinction between philosophy and rhetoric. He writes, “Philosophy is in the business of inferring, that is, investigating and discovering ideas. Rhetoric, on the other hand, has the job of proving, or advocating those ideas” (1005). A similar definition of rhetoric is operative with Alexander Bain, who writes, “Rhetoric discusses the means whereby language, spoken or written, may be rendered effective” (1146). Likewise, Adams Sherman Hill writes that rhetoric does not observe, discover or classify. Rather “it shows how to convey from one mind to another the results of observation, discovery, or classification; it uses knowledge, not as knowledge, but as power” (1149). Rhetoric does not tell a person “with something to say” but “how best to say that with which he has provided himself” (1149). And Chaim Perelman notes that rhetoric has been held in contempt by philosophers because Aristotle believed rhetoric “taught only how to present a point of view—that is to say, a partial aspect of the question” (1391).

The reasons behind this pervasive traditional formulation of rhetoric have their roots in the Platonic-Aristotelian definitions of rhetoric, which were for their part based on objectivist formulations of epistemology. Those formulations are no longer credited by rhetoricians *or* philosophers.

The Aristotelian Approach: Communicating Already-Formed Ideas

Aristotle believed that he had access not only to absolute truth in a great many areas of knowledge and life but also to reliable epistemological methods for examining issues of concern to him. Rhetoric has occasionally, but mistakenly, taken to be a tool for examining and exploring important questions in any field. The mistake finds its roots in the scope, sheer quantity, and complexity of Aristotle's writings comprising his philosophical system, which is a theory of knowledge, of being, of God, of the natural world including physics, astronomy, and biology, and of politics and ethics. His theory of knowledge is the original justification for various forms of objectivism in that it finds a foundation for certain knowledge, a-perspectival and absolute—an unqualified convergence of knowledge (truth) and reality or of reason and cause. His theories of being and god constitute the original philosophical justifications for the claim that the universe is moral. In other words, he claimed that more or better formed beings are better than less formed beings, and using that claim, he found a source of ultimate value independent of humans. Using a series of dichotomies—form and matter, mind and body, soul and mind, etc.—along with the concept of final cause (which says that the cause of an acorn is the grown oak and is a theory of process and change), he claimed to have identified a hierarchy of values in the very nature of

the universe, which justifies various ethical and political ideologies, such as the original systematic justifications for slavery, patriarchy, and inequality generally.

Aristotle's students studying his *On Rhetoric*, were expected to have been already well versed in his teachings on ethics, politics, and knowledge explained elsewhere. Aristotle writes that "rhetoric is an offshoot" (154, translated by W. Rhys Roberts in *The Rhetorical Tradition*) of ethical and political studies. But he does not mean that rhetoric is a tool for understanding ethical and political subjects. The principles and generalizations of those fields have already been made in other works of Aristotle. What he means is that the practitioner of rhetoric should already be in possession of that knowledge. What he thinks about justice, reasoning, women, slavery, the demos, democracies, etc., are all background assumptions of the ideas he advances in *On Rhetoric*. The dependence of *On Rhetoric* on his other works can be seen in that several of his foundational works are actually named in the text. For example, he explicitly refers to *Prior Analytics*, *Posterior Analytics*, *Topics*, *Ethics*, *Politics*, and *Methodics*, *Poetics*, and *Theodectea*. And there are frequent references to concepts, definitions, and discussions elaborated in those works.³ Of course, even without such references those foundational concepts are embedded in theoretical definitions and divisions of rhetoric. For example, when he talks about pathos, or appeal to emotions, he assumes that his students already know that he is talking about a faculty of the soul, "faculty" and "soul" being elaborate concepts playing crucial roles throughout his philosophy, and the emotional faculty being one of the faculties with distinct characteristics.

Aristotle goes through great lengths to identify a basis for reliable knowledge (episteme) in his oeuvre, a basis having nothing to do with either civic or communal

discourse. His overall attitude towards the demos of his time—and therefore the possibility of civic discourse—can only be justified through a thorough-going epistemological elitism, which his philosophy represents. In “Oppression, Emotions, and the Institutional Definition of Critical Thinking,” I studied every description of audience that Aristotle offers in three translations of *On Rhetoric*. I found that “for Aristotle, the audience of rhetoric—that is, the public sitting in courts, assemblies, and public events of Athens—is characterized by descriptions that have been translated as weak-minded, of limited intellectual scope, mob-like, base, low-grade, morally weak, defective, or corrupted” (144). Rhetoric for Aristotle is not concerned with knowledge production. The sections in *On Rhetoric* dealing with ethical and political issues are meant to offer his students who are already in possession of knowledge a brief survey of the disheveled landscape of the confused ideas and views held by the “many” who are ruled by their emotions. The problem that *On Rhetoric* tries to answer is how to persuade the demos, who, in *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle says are impervious to argument and seem capable of responding only to force because they “live by their feelings” (1179b 9-18, Terence Irwin’s translation).

Like George Campbell, whose job as a preacher required him to persuade a less-than-animated Sunday-morning audience of the truth and value of the gospel (938-944), students of Aristotle’s rhetoric do not see themselves preparing to manipulate a trusting audience. Rather, they are preparing themselves to help a confused and weak-minded audience—not really to understand—but to think and behave according to the dictates of Truth. Children, patients, and the audience may not know what is good for them; they may have inklings of the true and the good, but they do not have the intellectual education and tools to determine

³ See, for example, the index to Kennedy’s translation of *Rhetoric*.

for themselves. In this context, *On Rhetoric* can fairly be considered a manual for one-way persuasion of an audience of the communicator's already formed—and presumably good—ideas.⁴

The formulation of the problematic of *On Rhetoric* is a direct result of Aristotle's views about democracy and the *demos* and his epistemological hierarchy, according to which ethics, politics, and theology were disciplines outside the sphere of civic discourse. He believed in what we practice in modern times, namely, that knowledge is a property of experts and that politics should be studied by political scientists and ethics by ethicists. Aristotle's views are faithfully reflected in James Kinneavy, who writes, universities should teach "three quite different kinds of thinking—scientific (in logic and dialectic), persuasive (in rhetoric), and aesthetic (in the study of literature, the grammar of the tradition)" (73). Experts have to learn to speak to non-experts for a variety of reasons (for example, so that the public can hold the experts accountable). So his formulation of rhetoric is "the ability to address the populace in persuasive language that, to be listened to, will often have to be intensive, even impassioned, audience-based, and stylistically appropriate to a segment of the populace" (74), along the lines in which the public is currently being addressed by political and military scientists.

⁴ Both Chaim Perelman (1390) and Gregory Clark (27-32) argue that Aristotle's discussion of dialectical reasoning in *On Rhetoric* is offered as his authorized way of rationally assessing values. I acknowledge the usefulness of the topics in *On Rhetoric* for seeing different sides of arguments. And I am willing to accept that Aristotle and perhaps his careful students were using the topics as discussed in *On Rhetoric* for that purpose. But I don't think Perelman and Clark's arguments take into account Aristotle's metaphysics and epistemology as well as his overall views about the Athenian democracy, his political alignment with Macedonia (the victor and occupier of Athens), and Aristotle's views about intuition and demonstration.

The Deweyan Approach: Forming Ideas Through Communication

The collapse of the theoretical justifications for the foundational claims of Aristotle's epistemology has created new problems and suggested new formulations of communication and language. Aristotle's sharp separation of human values and emotions from what he considered certain knowledge has left contemporary philosophy of science unequipped with a theory allowing rational assessment of values. Chaim Perelman, for example, notes "the lack of success in developing a logic of value judgments" (1377) and invites further research. But there have also been extraordinarily productive possibilities opened up for new formulations of communication and language. The common thread in the new formulations is communal human activity. People are already always in the world doing things. Since knowledge of the type Aristotle claimed to have has been proved impossible to acquire, knowledge and ideas and in fact language itself are considered formed through communication, that is, through symbolic interaction accompanying communal human activity. John Dewey, Barbara Hernstein Smith, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Michael Bakhtin, among others, have offered versions of this new formulation of communication. In this subsection, I describe this new formulation by focusing on Dewey and Bakhtin's views, Dewey's for his concentration on the activity context of communication and Bakhtin's for his emphasis on communication in the context of activity.

In *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, John Dewey identifies an organic basis for inquiry. Being in a state of flux and movement, organisms live in and with an environment. In order to maintain life, they seek equilibrium when they come out of balance with their environment. The beginnings of knowledge are from this activity to restore balance, so for example, when an animal is hungry, it will look around and search for food. Through

experience of searching for food, it forms a store of knowledge, in some animals in the form of useful habits and in higher-order animals and specially humans in the form of both useful habits and a store of memories (23-41). Humans, however, have the additional ability to use language, which has come about through the symbolic interaction (communication) of humans in their equilibrium-seeking activities. Thus, communication and language are bound up with and subsumed under activity. Dewey writes that the meaning communicated through language “is established by agreements of different persons in existential activities having reference to existential consequences” (47). Through language, humans evoke “different activities performed by different persons so as to produce consequences that are shared by all the participants in the conjoint undertaking” (48).

He writes that the behavioral change from organic to intellectual is “a product of the fact that individuals live in a cultural environment. Such living compels them to assume in their behavior the standpoint of customs, beliefs, institutions, meanings and projects which are at least relatively general and objective” (45). He defines language broadly to include “all means of communication such as, for example, monuments, rituals, and formalized arts . . . Language is the record that perpetuates occurrences and renders them amenable to public consideration” (20). The use of language implies a proto-philosophical definition of objectivity as intersubjectivity. He writes that, though emerging from biological activities, language “compels one individual to take the standpoint of other individuals and to see and inquire from a standpoint that is not strictly personal but is common to them as participants or ‘parties’ in a conjoint undertaking” (46). And thus, although language “may be directed by and towards some physical existence, . . . it first has reference to some other person or persons with whom it institutes communication—the making of something common” (46).

Finally, he argues that meanings of words come from their use in cooperative interaction. He writes, "The convention or common consent which sets [a particular physical object] apart as a means of recording and communicating meaning is that of agreement in action; of shared modes of responsive behavior and participation in their consequences" (47). According to Dewey, through language, we evoke "different activities performed by different persons so as to produce consequences that are shared by all the participants in the conjoint undertaking" (48). These last two statements are similar to formulations of Harnstein Smith's language loop theory: "the dynamic system of social interactions through which, without either mental telegraphy or meaning in any classic sense, communication (or something like it) seems to occur" (53). She writes,

Communication may be seen as, among other things, a circuit or system of reciprocal effectivity, that is, a dynamic process that works—has appropriate effects, but not the same effects—for both those who act and those who re-act: speakers and listeners, or writers and readers (etc.), respectively. (The 'etcetera' here embraces all forms of reciprocally interactive agents, whatever the mode of medium—oral, textual, gestural, pictorial, tactile, electronic, and so forth—through which their acts and reactions are produced, or, in the instance, transmitted.). That circuit or system may be described as a set of more or less naturally occurring interlooping acts and reactions and their more or less appropriate consequences for the various parties involved: 'naturally occurring' in the sense that those acts and reactions are continuous

with other forms of human (and in some respects, more broadly organic) action and reaction and, accordingly, require no special, unique mechanisms for their explanation. (54)

Similar views have been expressed by Wittgenstein, who believed “that the meaning of concepts is given by their use in a practice” (Trigg, 19), that is, “concepts are “grounded in ways of acting.” For Martin Heidegger as well, the primary relationship of humans with the world is functional. Humans are already and dynamically in the world, engaged in activities. Language is an outgrowth of the functional relationship of humans in the world.

One of the most thorough elaborations of this function-based notion of communication and language is done by Mikhael Bakhtin through his use of the Marxian notion of praxis.⁵ Bakhtin does not see discourse as a stand-alone structure—or a “floating signifier.” Words have no permanent, determinate meaning as standalone signs. In *The Problem of Speech Genres*, he writes that “all the diverse areas of human activity involve the use of language. . . . Language is realized in the form of individual utterances (oral and written) by participants in the various areas of human activity” (1227). The “diverse areas of human activity” is what Wittgenstein would call “forms of life.” And Bakhtin’s use of “speech genres” as “relatively stable types of . . . utterances” bears a striking resemblance to Wittgenstein’s concept of “language games.”

In *Dialogue, Dialectic, and Conversation*, Gregory Clark writes that according to Bakhtin, “social knowledge is constructed in a cooperative exchange of texts” (8). Clark

⁵ The pragmatist notion of truth may very well have its roots in Marx’s thoughts. Bertrand Russell in *History of Western Philosophy* writes, “So far as I know, Marx was the first philosopher who criticized the notion of ‘truth’ from this activist point of view” (784), the activist point of view being Marx’s notion that “we only notice things [Marx’s notion of truth and meaning] as part of the process of acting with reference to them, and any theory which leaves out action is a misleading abstraction” (784).

argues that Bakhtin's view supports "a social constructionist point of view: that our language creates rather than conveys our reality" (9). In fact, Clark goes on to say that according to Bakhtin inner personality "is an expressed or inwardly impelled word" (9). Bakhtin argues further that "because the language we use makes us, unavoidably, participants in a meaning making dialogue, we must hold ourselves responsible for that meaning we help to make" (9). That is, one's "discourse must always interact with the discourse of others" and be "exposed to the judgment and response of others who hold the maker of the statement responsible for it." This view of language requires that we always view "communication as participants in a dialogue." We are always "on the boundary of self and the other" (Todorov cited in Clark, 96). Consequently, anything we might communicate is 'wholly determined' by our immediate social experience and the broader social milieu" (Bakhtin, "Marxism," 86). Because we can understand our own experience only in terms of its commonality we are continually confronting each other with a mandate to construct from separate perceptions a common interpretation" (10).

For Bakhtin, language is never neutral; we all bring our beliefs and values to a dialogue. "In actuality, we never say or hear words, we say or hear what is true or false, good or bad, important or unimportant, pleasant or unpleasant, and so on. Words are always filled with content and meaning drawn from behavior or ideology" . . . (Marxism 70)" (10). All utterance should be "exposed to the collaborative process of judgment, revision, and redefinition that enables people to construct beliefs and values they can genuinely share" (10). Communication is the interaction of utterance and understanding through dialogue aimed at people who are trying to cooperate (13).

According to Clark, for Bakhtin, understanding or response has a priority in dialogue. For the dialogue to be fruitful, there has to be a response, and the proper response is related to understanding (15). The kind of dialogics that Bakhtinian theory advocates calls for holding all utterances responsible; all texts of a community would have to be “read in terms of the particular social context in which they were generated, as texts situated ‘historically or imaginatively in a field of other person’s utterances (790). Second, all texts written by members of that community would be written dialogically, written both in response to what others have written before and in the anticipation of the responses of readers who will hold them answerable. Such discourse would sustain within the community a constant consciousness of where their texts come from, how they come to mean, and how they function there” (16).”

The new formulation of communication sees knowledge, not as something we receive intuitively or discover through the application of a formula, but as something that we arrive at through communication in cooperative activity. In “The Rhetoric of Inquiry as an Intellectual Movement,” Herbert H. Simons argues that rhetoric should be one “of invention and sound judgment in the conduct of inquiry” (20). The idea “of an emancipatory, dialogic rhetoric is one worth a central place in the academy. But it requires of us that we conceive of rhetoric, not simply as an art of proving opposites, but also as an art of arraying and comparing ideas after first having attempted to give each its most forceful expression. And it invites us to further conceive of rhetoric, not simply as an art of expression of or reader-reception, but as one of intellectual exchange” (21). This is a vision of rhetoric that is similar to David Fleming’s, in “Rhetoric as a Course of Study.” Fleming suggests that we adopt a definition of rhetoric that goes back to Isocrates. He suggests that we should see rhetoric

neither too broadly, as a synonym for persuasion, nor too narrowly, as an art or technique for bringing about persuasion “by means of a specific strategy” (176). Rather, we should aim to see rhetoric as a deep-rooted, practical skill that is valuable both for society and the individual. According to Isocrates, this type of rhetorical education aims at “sound judgement in dealing with particulars” (179). The goal is helping form a character, who according to Isocrates, “is able by his powers of conjecture to arrive generally at the best course” (180), in addition to giving “good counsel.”

Simmons asks, “What then are the optimal conditions for productive intellectual exchange? What norms of discourse ought to guide processes of scholarly reporting, discussion, and debate? What institutional arrangements are most likely to facilitate adherence to those norms?” (21). As in the old Aristotelian philosophy, the new formulation needs a series of carefully developed and critically examined concepts. For example, the new formulation must take into account agency and consciousness. Are people’s thoughts and behaviors wholly determined by their social environment; cultural, ideological, economical, etc.? Do people have any freedom? If yes, what is the scope of that freedom? Can they literally do anything they wish? But are they constrained by certain natural and social facts, forces, or realities? If Aristotelian/positivist objectivism is rejected, what type of objectivity can we claim? Why should anyone find our claims and arguments useful? In the next section, I will discuss the research direction I propose in light of the efforts of philosophers of science and rhetoricians of inquiry to examine similar issues.

Why Should We Foreground Idea Formation in the Discipline of Rhetoric and Professional Communication?

Idea formation in the professions should be scrutinized more carefully along the lines that idea formation has been scrutinized by philosophers, sociologists, and rhetoricians of science (See, for example, the works of Karl Popper, Bruno Latour and Dorothy Winsor). As mentioned, rhetoric has traditionally been associated with advocacy and persuasion—not with “discovery.” An understanding of the collapse of the foundational claims of Aristotelian philosophy means, among other things, that advocacy should be considered only a small part of a much larger process, which is founded on discovery or invention. This change in the emphasis of rhetoric should foreground idea formation in professional communication. And I don’t mean merely how professionals think about how most effectively to communicate their already formed ideas about their subject matter—I mean how professionals form their ideas about the subject matter through communication.

As Faber’s and my synthesized definition of professionalism shows, the key characteristic of professionals that guarantees their social position is their access to specialized knowledge. The broad research direction I am proposing is a variation on what philosophers of science, sociologists of knowledge, and rhetoricians of inquiry have been doing for some time. In the next section, I am going to focus on only one of the findings of the feminist philosophers of science: the discovery of the omnipresence of values in all aspects of idea formation, and a review of some partial solutions to the problems that this discovery has had for inquiry.

Value-Ladenness of the Scientific Professions

The new formulations of communication and language see all communities as locations where knowledge is produced. But knowledge production in professional communication is particularly close to scientific activity, for professions make a great deal of effort to model themselves after science; they claim to have access to specialized, systematic knowledge, and they emulate the methodologies and theories of science. Moreover, unlike a great many other—more innocuous—communities, the decisions that professionals make have wide ranging moral and policy implications. As I present the views and findings of theorists in this section, I will not explicitly and repeatedly connect those views to professionalism. The key insight of the philosophy of science is that inquiry is thoroughly infused with values and that an adequate theory of inquiry and idea formation requires some way of assessing and choosing among values. This insight applies as much to scientific inquiry as to idea formation in the professions.

Helen Longino, a leading feminist philosopher of science, argues that “knowledge is shaped by the assumptions, values and interest of a culture” (54), and as we can switch cultures, we have a choice in the matter of what theories of science we accept. She writes, “We can continue to do establishment science, comfortably wrapped in the myths of scientific rhetoric or we can alter our intellectual allegiances. While remaining committed to an abstract goal of understanding, we can choose to whom, socially and politically, we are accountable in our pursuit of that goal. In particular we can choose between being accountable to the traditional establishment or to our political comrades” (54).

Longino is not arguing for arbitrary intrusion of bias in inquiry. She is foregrounding the fact that establishment science already accepts certain “political considerations as

relevant constraints on reasoning, which, through their influence on reasoning and interpretation, shape content” (55). For example, she points out that conducting science “requires financial support and those who provide that support are increasingly industry and the military. As might be expected they support research projects likely to meet their needs. . . . Our sciences are being harnessed to the making of money and the waging of war. The possibility of alternate understandings of the natural world is irrelevant to a culture driven by those interests. To do feminist science, we must change the social and political context in which science is done” (56).

Sandra Harding writes in “Strong Objectivity: A Response to the New Objectivity Question” that the traditional model of objectivity, or objectivism, “defends and legitimates the institutions and practices through which the distortions and their often exploitative consequences are generated. It certifies as value-neutral, normal, natural, and therefore not political at all the policies and practices through which powerful groups can gain the information and explanations that they need to advance their priorities” (“Response” 337).

Looking at a value-neutral definition of the scientific method, Harding observes, “the internal mechanisms for maintaining objectivity are, at their best—in the absence of sycophancy toward those with prestige, professional jealousies, narrow cliques, and national provincialism—able to nullify individual capricious errors and biases, but they reinforce the shared biases of the scientific community. The demand for objectivity, the separation of observation and reporting from the researchers’ wishes, which is so essential for the development of science, becomes the demand for separation of thinking from feeling. This promotes moral detachment in scientists which, reinforced by specialization and bureaucratization, allows them to work on all sorts of dangerous and harmful projects with

indifference to the human consequences. The idealized egalitarianism of a community of scholars has shown itself to be a rigid hierarchy of scientific authorities integrated into the general class structure of the society and modeled on the corporation” (quoted in “Response” by Harding on page 334. The passage is from Levins and Lewontin 1993, pp. 315-316).

Harding sees the great challenge facing professionals (as I define them) to overcoming their thoughts. She writes, “In hierarchically organized societies, the daily activities of people in the ruling groups tend to set distinctive limits on their thought, limits that are not created by the activities of the subjugated groups. Administrative-managerial activities, including the work of the natural and social sciences, is the form of “ruling” in our contemporary modern societies, and the conceptual frameworks of our disciplines are shaped by administrative-managerial priorities, just as pre-scientific observations of nature are shaped by other cultural priorities. Such priorities do enable gaining the kinds of information administrators need to function effectively, but they also distort and limit our understanding of just what brings about daily social relations and interactions with nature, and they make it difficult to think possible any different kind of interactions. In order to gain a causal critical view of the interests and values that constitute the dominant conceptual projects, one must start one’s thought, one’s research project, from *outside* those conceptual schemes and the activities that generate them; one must start from the lives excluded as origins of their design—from “marginal lives” (“Response” 341-342).

When values are not explicitly highlighted and examined, Harding argues that “the neutrality ideal functions more through what its normalizing procedures and concepts implicitly prioritize than through explicit directives. . . . This normalizing politics frequently defines the objections of its victims and any criticisms of its institutions, practices, or

conceptual world as agitation by special interests that threatens to damage the neutrality of science and its “civilizing mission”, as an earlier generation saw the matter. Thus when sciences are already in the service of the mighty, scientific neutrality ensures that “might makes right”. (“Response” 337).

The traditional appeal to method for ensuring objectivity in science is wrong-headed because, Harding writes, “It is only after a research project is already *constituted* that methods of research, in the usual narrow sense of the term, start up” (“Response” 338). Her suggestion for scientists who do sincerely wish to understand and recognize the limiting effects of their dominant position in society is to adopt her standpoint theory, which requires that they “*begin* from the recognition of social inequality” (“Response,” 341).

Chaim Perelman recognizes that the sharp separation between judgments of reality and value stems “from an absolutist epistemology which tends to sharply separate two sides of human activity” (1377). He believes values can only be assessed in arguments. And he has compiled a list of characteristics that can help orators examine questions of value: The goal must be “adherence of the audience to some thesis” (1391). There has to be goodwill in orators to “persuade not compel.” There have to be rules and “institutions to further discussion between competent persons and to prevent others.” It has to be accepted that opposed positions may be “equally reasonable” (1392). The audience whose adherence is sought should be “thought of. . . as encompassing all reasonable and competent men” (1393), an “ideal” or “universal” audience (1393). In fact, aside from its effectiveness, the quality of an argument is measured by “the quality of the audience at which it is aimed.” There are also very “general propositions which can serve, at need, to justify values” (1394).

It is my belief that the question of values backgrounded within our own (and, where applicable, any other discipline of study) must be addressed for our research to begin to reflect the crucial insights of philosophers and sociologists of the last century.

Where Might We Reasonably Look to Learn How Professionals Form Ideas?

If for the Athenian thinkers of 500-400 BCE, the civic problems of their society came from a consideration of the instabilities of direct participatory democracy, I believe the great civic problems of our society come from the growing professionalization of our representative democracy. Professionals make the most important decisions in the country: what is true and real, what are public hazards, illnesses, shortcomings, problems, and possible solutions. Extraordinary decisions have been made during the last two years. Only recently, it was accepted as a true proposition—so certain and important as to justify a pre-emptive war against Iraq—that Iraq posed a clear and present danger to us. More than two years ago, the U.S. government began manufacturing small nuclear weapons and adopting the doctrines/policies of unilateralism, of military pre-emption, and of first-use of nuclear weapons even against non-nuclear countries.

In this context, it is striking that the news we read is collected, evaluated, and presented to us by professional organizations that seem not to be concerned with the value-ladenness of the claims they are making. National and international policy decisions are being made in policy institutes, academia, and government bureaucracies run by professional political scientists and other experts of various kind, who give advice to professional politicians. The public has ceded an inordinate amount of control and supervision of its civic

life to professionals. To many observers, political participation in the United States is at the level of going to a movie theater and choosing one of a dozen movies to watch, all of which have been produced by armies of professionals.

The direction of research I propose is actually of far greater weight than that of philosophers of science. I would like to discover answers to the following questions: Who are the people making these decisions about war and peace? What are their values? And how do they arrive at their ideas? How do they earn and maintain the respect and trust of the public? Noam Chomsky questions whether intellectuals involved in policy making, who present themselves as experts, in fact have any kind of expertise. He writes, “Should decisions be left to ‘experts’ with Washington contacts—that is, even if we assume that they command the necessary knowledge and principles to make the ‘best’ decision, will they invariably do so? And, a logically prior question, is ‘expertise’ applicable—that is, is there a body of theory and of relevant information, not in the public domain, that can be applied to the analysis of foreign policy or that demonstrates the correctness of present actions in some ways that the psychologists, mathematicians, chemists, and philosophers are incapable of comprehending?” (66-67). Does Chomsky have a point? If so, how do such leaders maintain their positions?

It is easy, and tempting, to say that professional decision makers are conditioned by a set of social forces, such as ideology or economic interest or that they are corrupt. I don’t entirely reject those explanations. But assuming that we do have a level of freedom and that we can choose and learn, assuming, with Dewey, that my calling these professionals corrupt is a form of dogmatism that supposes “serious moral conflict is between something clearly bad and something known to be good” (266 *Quest*), and assuming with Nel Noddings that

these are “people of moderate goodwill who have a natural interest [at least] in their own well-being” (164 *Women*), then how do professionals arrive at their decisions? And if as Noam Chomsky claims the problem is that “the norm [in our society] is obedience, adoption of uncritical attitudes, taking the easy path of self-deception” (39), then how has that norm been established?

According to Fleming, the ultimate goal of rhetoric is preparing people for a “genuine and open-ended democracy” (180). I agree, and the value-laden framework of my proposal is a desire for strengthening democracy based on the belief that democracies place the best-known curb on the exercise of arbitrary power, which arises from dogmatism.

I think we can take from Bakhtin, who lived under one of the most brutal tyrannies in history, that whatever rhetoric is, it should promote dialogue and understanding. He believed that only through the dialogic process of utterance and understanding can communication “function ethically by enabling us to decide what is true and what is not, what is good and what is not, and what we will, both individually and collectively, believe and do” (17).

Informal Example of Idea Formation in the Profession of Agricultural Science

In this section, I will offer a broad outline of an organization in which I worked in order to highlight some of the questions to which the research direction I propose gives rise. Between 1996 and 1998, I worked as a database manager at a nonprofit organization, which was a consortium of 36 scientific agricultural associations from technology-intensive, generally pro-red-meat scientific disciplines in agriculture. The stated goal of the nonprofit organization was to educate representatives, policy makers, and the public about agricultural

issues. There were two board meetings a year. And each of 36 associations selected and sent between one and three high-ranking (usually middle-aged, well-known, male scientists, department chairs, deans, even former university chancellors) members to the meetings. There was an executive committee that made key decisions and presented the board with proposals. Board meetings had a general session after which a keynote speaker took the rostrum and short, pro-forma debates were held on a few issues. Board meetings were mainly good for (a) selecting issues (in committees) to write reports on and (b) voting on the priority of research topics and on questions forwarded by the executive committee meeting. There was a staff of 10, with two poles of power: the EVP and the Science Editor. The EVP was in charge, traveled, was paid well, and not surprisingly had strong social skills. The EVP was in contact with the advisory board, which consisted of select donating corporations. The vast majority of the money came from corporations. The EVP would write personal renewal letters to large donors. He would also choose task force members to write reports. He and lead scientists made presentations to congressional panels. A communication director was in charge of the newsletter, the Web site, and press releases. On-going lip service was paid to the idea of expanding the membership base to reduce the influence of corporations. More serious efforts were made to get government grant money. A subcontractual lobbying firm in DC distributed, in person, copies of reports and discussed reports with representatives at their offices or in informal and formal meetings. The lobbyists' strategy was explained as follows: whoever is more organized, has the better prepared document, and gets more time with representatives wins.

Dewey's theory of inquiry and communication would be particularly suited for exploring issues such as the following in the context I have just described: The effects of the

presence of institutional values and power relations on the formation of ideas at organizational staff, executive committee, board, board committee, advisory board, and scientific task force meetings; in Congress; in the lobbying firm; in financing corporations; and in connection to members and the public at large. Dewey's framework would also help us explore the conditions under which institutional values are examined (from outside or inside the very many different communities in the organization); how relevant problems are identified, formulated, or dismissed (within those communities); methods for coming up with guesses (tentative ideas); people allowed to or prevented from contributing to this process; operating theoretical frameworks for scientists and administrators; the processes by which goals and agendas are set for discussion and inquiry in various communities and in the organization as a whole; the effect of the interaction of the competing goals and values of the communities in relation to the larger organization and of the larger organization in relation to the society in which it operates; the patterns of competing goals and values that lend themselves to communities that do not produce good ideas; the way dissenting views are sought out, suppressed, permitted to be heard, or ignored.

Dewey's theories also pose a set of questions for the individual participant/communicator in those communities. Are the ideas issuing from a community good for the communicator as the communicator would define the *good* for herself or himself? Do the good ideas of the community and the organization match his or her ideas of his or her rights, responsibilities, and privileges in society? In other words, is the communication environment conducive to his or her flourishing (or growth and development as Dewey would say) as a human being, a citizen, a parent, a spouse, or an employee? Does the organization empower the participant/communicator (in the Deweyan sense, does it allow

him or her to arrive at ideas freely, that is, through a process of unencumbered critical reflection about the means and ends of life)? Or does it allow his or her inquiring mind only a severely circumscribed scope?

Suggestions for Future Study of Idea Formation in the Professions

In this subsection, I will touch on the crucial areas that the new formulation of rhetoric allows RPC to study.

In Journalism: An ethnographic study of news rooms, along the lines of Latour and Woolgar though perhaps without their problematic sociological assumptions. Consider the newsroom as a laboratory and examine how knowledge is produced and presented. What values operate in the production of news? What are the standards of objectivity? The methods of inquiry? Contrast public and professional perceptions of the field.

In policy institutes (think tanks): Examine think tanks and public policy institutes, the selection of experts, the editorial direction of papers. Discuss foundational values of think tanks. What does it mean that a think tank is “conservative” or “liberal”? Do such assumptions ever receive scrutiny? What type of internal communication is used? Agonistic? Examine the source and roots of professional trust.

The entertainment industry. An RPC colleague who has interviewed several composers for film in Hollywood and in Italian movie studios reports of the massive, complex professional organizations behind the making of films. Who are the people involved? What are their backgrounds and value systems? What ideas of human life, society, art, and politics do they have? How do end products with their embedded intentional

meanings come about? What processes and institutional and professional checks do ideas have to go through? What changes accrue to ideas through this process? Even assuming a maximally cynical view of the complicity of entertainment professionals, what are the beliefs of professionals about their moral responsibilities to the public? What Bakhtinian dialogue takes place before a product is produced? What are the structural forces at work? How do unusual, counter-hegemonic movies nevertheless occasionally manage to come out of the industry? How responsive is the entertainment industry to audiences? How far can the movie industry go in shaping the response of the audience? How consciously do entertainment professionals think about the effects of their movies? What do they explicitly and implicitly think about the audience? Who are the categories of real audiences? Does the entertainment industry assume an Aristotelian approach towards its audience? Is the movie industry a good metaphor for the relationship of all professional communicators with the public?

The academy. RPC researchers have to study professional communication in the academy, and most specifically in departments where communication studies of one form or another are being taught. In fact, this project should be embedded as part of the very professional responsibility of any program of professional communication. The key question is how do professionals (say, in English departments) arrive at their administrative, disciplinary, and pedagogic ideas? What are the assumptions they bring in to their professions? What have they done to examine those assumptions? What institutional or social barriers or opportunities to examining those assumptions exist? How can conditions be created so that the best ideas can potentially be formed? What conditions are detrimental to idea formation? Assumptions about knowledge, research, and communication have to be

methodically identified and examined. Exit interviews with undergraduate and graduate students, faculty members, and administrators might be of use in this project. If rhetoric is to fulfill its ambitions as a discipline that can legitimately examine how any group of people forms ideas, then the discipline must simply be at the very forefront of all areas of research in which idea formation in all its manifestations is discussed: in physiology, psychology, sociology, philosophy, history, literature, political science, journalism, speech communication.

Conclusion

In this paper I argued that a major line of inquiry in rhetoric and professional communication should be how ideas are formed in professions. I established my claim in five steps. First, I argued that *professionals are those people doing the thinking part of the intellectual division of labor that goes along with the industrial and social divisions of labor*. Second, I argued that any new conceptualization of rhetoric that wishes to avoid the pitfalls of Aristotelian philosophy should recognize that knowledge is arrived at through communicative social interaction in the process of communal activity. In the new conceptualization, discovery and invention are foregrounded. Two important implications of this conceptualization are that as a discipline, rhetoric should be attentive to how ideas are formed in a given context and as pedagogy, it should aim to teach students how to examine the context in order to arrive at sound judgments and to give good advice. Third, I explained what I mean by studying idea formation in professional communication by touching on how a similar direction in research has been pursued by two leading feminist philosophers of

science. I also argued that this line of inquiry be pursued in a more determined way in RPC. Fourth, I offered as an informal case study a professional environment I once worked in, to indicate what kind of questions the type of inquiry I propose would inevitably give rise to. Finally, I offered a list of professional settings in which this type of inquiry can be conducted.

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CHAPTER 3. LIMITS OF COUNTERING STEREOTYPES THROUGH THE USE OF VISUAL RHETORIC: A STUDY OF PHOTOGRAPHS OF IRAN

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Abstract

In this paper I explore what I learned from preparing a brief, photograph-intensive presentation after 9/11 to counter the widespread stereotypes of Iranians. As time progressed, I became increasingly concerned about the complexities involved in countering stereotypes with photographs, for example, about the danger of what amounts to replacing one set of stereotypes with another in the audience. I adopt an interpretation of Plato's dialogues that sees them as embodiments of the practice of philosophy—as opposed to a body of doctrines—to argue that the core of Plato's objections against believing that paintings represent the truth about the world remain important insights. According to this interpretation, Plato believed knowledge could be had through the dramas of living and

conversing, which Platonic dialogues attempt to recreate. In Plato's Socratic dialogues, interlocutors introduce ideas for discussion; Socrates interrogates those ideas; an *aporia* or crisis is reached; and new approaches to exploring the ideas are explored although often dialogues end without a resolution of the original issues. This interpretation allows stereotypes to be seen as ideas that are part of larger social conversations among various groups. And photographs for countering stereotypes can most effectively be used to create disruptions or *aporias*, crises of opinion, in those who stereotype, and perhaps to suggest possible paths to further inquiry, but they may be unable to do more.

Introduction

As an Iranian-American, I was overwhelmed by the war rhetoric being directed by the U.S. administration against Iran and the Middle East in the months after 9/11. My response was to create for a U.S. audience a visually intensive and dramatic presentation designed to counter stereotypes of my native land. This chapter provides a brief analysis of Iran as a curious lacuna in postcolonial scholarship, describes the theoretical perplexities that stymied my attempt to use visual images to counter American stereotypes about that country, and provides suggestions for implementing a writing pedagogy that helps students examine and counter stereotyped images.

The Absence of the Topic of Iran in Postcolonial Scholarship

Lack of academic interest in non-Western cultures and especially in topics related to Iran has contributed to stereotypes of non-Westerners and Iranians. A consistent preoccupation of postcolonial studies has been the representation of the postcolonial subject. One of the most widely influential approaches has been Edward Said's *Orientalism*, an extended study of the representation of non-Western Arabs and Muslims by western scholars. According to Said, the Orient "that appears in Orientalism . . . is a system of representations framed by a whole set of forces that brought the Orient into Western learning, Western consciousness, and later, Western empire" (142). Representation is a driving concern of key postcolonial scholar Gayatri Spivak, who has been consistently on the look-out for "the possibility that the intellectual is complicit in the persistent constitution of the Other as the Self's shadow" (Norton, 2193). Although these and other explorations have been invaluable, much of the work of postcolonial and cultural theorists has served to underestimate and perhaps undermine collective political or even effective scholarly activity. For example, Spivak argued, at least initially, that the subaltern could *not* be represented; worse yet, the subaltern could not represent herself.

Terry Eagleton writes in *After Theory* that the field of postcolonial studies participates in a larger move by the Western intellectual left, away from a concern with collective political action to one with culture. This move, Eagleton argues, tacitly acknowledges the futility of political action. Anouar Majid, in "The Failure of Postcolonial Theory after 9/11," has also offered a sharp critique, noting that despite important successes with theories of hybridity, displacement, and exile, postcolonial theory had failed to "attenuate the agony of uprootedness suffered by Muslims and other people in the last half century" (7). Majid cites

four Third World novelists (Cheikh Hamidou Kane, Tayeb Salih, Marietou M'Baye, and Abdelrahman Munif) who have written about cultural dislocations, identity crises, effects of colonialism, and resistance to destructive Western values that nevertheless have been internalized gradually—in short, about the peoples, societies, and cultures slowly being digested in the leviathan of capitalist economic globalization, a profoundly unbalanced interaction not designed to benefit those being digested. Yet for many postcolonial theorists, a middle class American's ability "to live in Chicago, to eat Moroccan, wear clothes made in China, drive Japanese cars, and speak Spanish" constitutes evidence that nationalism and other cultural exclusivities are collapsing and that "the world [is] being reborn as a pastiche of parts" (2). Majid states, in rebuttal, that the "Mexicans in Chicago do not prefer Illinois over their native states: They are simply forced into exile out of economic necessity" (3). In fact, it seems that postcolonial scholars have not been able to "read" the Iranian revolution so as to make it fit their theory. Even authoritative reports on the presence of a collective, powerful, and very successful political postcolonial movement have been ignored. Michele Foucault, who visited Iran specifically to see the revolution, announced to deaf ears that he had met in revolutionary Iran "an absolute collective will" (215), which he had thought was a "political myth. . . . something one would never encounter." Aside from cursory references, however, Iran is almost entirely absent from postcolonial literature (see indexes of *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, editors: Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman and of *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, & Postcolonial Perspectives* by editors Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat). Shallow or non-existent theoretical engagement with developments in Iran on the part of postcolonial scholars is surprising *precisely because* Iran represents countervailing evidence to the premature postcolonial

pronouncement of the irrelevance of nationalism and other unifying concepts—most notably, religious ones—to popular struggles. Arguably, the most important revolution of the second half of the Twentieth Century was the nationalist-religious revolution that took place in Iran in 1979, a revolution widely believed to have inaugurated the rise of fundamentalism in the Muslim world. In the glaring absence of any noticeable kind of critical engagement with Iran, what in the West we might otherwise know of that country—its diverse people, its lively intellectual communities, and its people’s various lifestyles—has been reduced to sound bites and to stereotyped images.

Representations of Iran

As Iranian-Americans discussed the possibility of the United States invading Iran after the Axis-of-Evil speech by the U.S. president, I was struck by the realization that I had never seen an image captured by a non-Iranian—be it in magazines, television, or cinema from Iran—that showed anything desirable from that culture.

Especially after 9/11, several books came out arguing that Islam has had a particularly violent past. For example, Morgon Norval’s *The Fifteen Century War: Islam’s Violent Past* and John F. Murphy, Jr.’s *Sword of Islam: Muslim Extremism from the Arab Conquest to the Attack on America*—depicted Islam as a virulent ideology relying on violence to spread itself. (As if any genocide, I could not help reminding myself, held a candle to the tens of millions murdered in Europe during the World Wars.) Of course, the Shi’ite term *ayatollah* has connotations beyond merely autocratic, e.g., bloodthirsty or criminally insane. In drawings, photos, and newspaper cartoons, ayatollahs are regularly represented as shadowy

figures of pure evil. These visuals encapsulate the average American's fear of all things Muslim.

Moreover, Iran is often mixed in with other countries and other cultures. For example, images of Iran in the media are overwhelmingly of deserts, and there has always been a fudging of lines between Arabs, Iranians, and Muslims even though (aside from the fact that there are Arabs who live in Iran and Iranians who live in Arab countries) calling *Iranians Arabs* mixes categories of as much importance and usefulness as those of *Italians* and *British*, or *Catholics* and *Protestants*.

This absence of differentiation is also evident in the depictions of Iranian women. Unlike women in Saudi Arabia, Iranian women vote and drive. Unlike women under the Taliban, Iranian women travel freely in public and make up more than half the students attending postsecondary school. Nor are Iranian women forced to wear the burqua although they are required to wear a manteau and headscarf. But the movie *Not Without My Daughter*, in which religious Iranian men are autocratic monsters and religious women have the conniving mindsets of old Hollywood movies' harem slaves, illustrates succinctly what most Americans think of gender relations in Iran.

As I began to construct the presentation, I assumed that the audience did not notice—and certainly was not outraged by—any of these stereotypes of Iran. I assumed, in short, that my audience would be mostly uninformed about international affairs, subjected to years of misinformation, and vulnerable to government perspectives barely if at all filtered through the media.

I planned to begin my presentation with the crudest visual depictions of the stereotypes, to encourage discomfort in the audience. I wanted it to recognize the stereotypes

but also to reject their influence. To draw connections between the experiences of Iranians and the experiences of the audience, I planned to compare information about Iran, in terms of population, area, number of students, cell phones, etc., with information about the state I was living in. The visuals I chose would heavily emphasize familiar sights and images: cars, expressways, parks, streets, houses and apartment, children and parents, show, historical buildings and monuments. I also planned to present a great many positive facts and images about Iran: number of university students (over 1.5 million), literacy rate (over 85%), number of villages with electricity (more than 40,000)⁶ as well as images of stunning historical buildings (mosques, palaces, public baths, squares, bridges, Zoroastrian fire temples) and art (carpets, calligraphy, miniature paintings). I would admit that Iran is three-quarters semi-desert and desert, but I would point out that most Iranians are mountain dwellers: Iran has two major mountain ranges with several mountains taller than any in the Rockies or the Alps. Another large segment of the population lives in an area twice the size of Taiwan, which has a Mediterranean to subtropical climate. There are traditional industries, but most of the country is heavily industrialized. For example, the automotive industry—including parts manufacturers—employs more than 500,000 people; these employees provide the livelihood for one to one and half million others, or the equivalent of half the population of Iowa or of Ireland (or the entire population of Estonia) making a living from manufacturing automobiles. Iran is self-sufficient in wheat production, itself providing the main staple food for its 70 million people. Such levels of production cannot be achieved without significant distribution of knowledge and capital.

⁶ These numbers are taken from the Statistical Center of Iran.

In recounting the history of Iran, I planned on keeping my focus on points of contact between Iran and the United States. I was determined to mention that the American financial advisor W. Morgan Shuster was greatly respected for helping the government of Iran put its finances in order before he was forced out of the country by the British. In countering the stereotype of Iranians as people who are at the core autocratic and antidemocratic, I was planning on devoting considerable time to the Iranian constitutional revolution of 1906, and I intended to mention the decision of Howard Baskerville (a teacher, probably a missionary) to join the revolutionaries during the siege of Tabriz by royalists.

But I also knew that I did not want the audience to feel smug. I wanted to emphasize their complicity in events surrounding the U.S. government's relationship with Iran. I was going to mention the occupation of Iran during World War II, the American-instigated 1953 coup against the democratically elected and popular Iranian premier, the U.S. support for Iraq during the bloody Iran-Iraq War—even *after* Iraq had used chemical weapons against Iranians.

Problems, Theoretical and Practical

Soon after beginning the project in earnest, I had to admit that my presentation conformed too closely to Aristotelian rhetoric and all the problems associated with that rhetorical model. For Aristotle, the rhetor has a vast advantage over the audience in terms of special knowledge, and the audience is considered incapable of following careful or lengthy lines of reasoning. Acquainting himself with the audience's likes and dislikes, establishing his own credibility, and using an abridged form of argument assisted with other techniques,

for example, metaphors “to conjure before our eyes an image” of what is being argued (Lawson-Tancred, 238), the rhetor is in a position to present in the most persuasive way. In the rhetorical situation that Aristotle envisions, the rhetor dismisses out of hand the possibility of improving the ideas of *all* participants (including the rhetor) through an exchange of views.

I encountered, in addition to these misgivings about the top-down style of communication I had adopted, two even more significant difficulties. One had to do with my use of images as a way of arguing about topics such as the condition of women in Iran. The other difficulty had to do with my growing appreciation for the range of topics that have to be examined to counter stereotypes effectively. I will begin with the first difficulty, which harkens to Plato’s famous injunctions against the visual.

Standard Accounts of Plato’s Injunctions Against the Visual

According to Moshe Barasch in *Theories of Art*, although Plato “never expounded a theory of the visual arts” (4), his philosophy had far-reaching and limiting implications for the development of visual art theory. Citing optical illusions involving water and coloring, Plato concludes that sense perception is “devoid of truth” (5), a view based on his broader understanding of the hierarchy of knowledge. Plato believed that behind the changing, day-to-day world of the senses, there exists another unchanging reality, which is the world of Ideas or Forms, from which the world of the senses is copied (Huby 17–20). Plato considered true knowledge to consist of the knowledge of the World of Ideas—that kind of knowledge he called *episteme*. And what could be known about the impermanent world he

called *opinion* or *doxa*; the latter, he divided into belief and conjecture, *belief* being opinions about concrete empirical things and *conjecture* being beliefs in phantoms, reflections, and shadows (or what does not really exist even as part of ephemeral reality) (20-22; see also Marias, 50).

Plato considered the knowledge of the artist and painter to be conjecture and explained art and painting in terms of the concept of imitation, or *mimesis* (Barasch): as the empirical world is an approximation, or copy, of the real world of forms, the pictorial image is merely a copy or approximation of the material objects it imitates. And since an image is always constructed from a certain angle or in a certain light, it can never be more than a “suggestion or evocation” (5). The classic formulation of this view appears in Book X of *Republic*, in which Plato writes that a carpenter can be said to have a vision of the couch being made whereas the painter copies (makes an image of) a particular couch (596b–598c). Thus the painting is merely a copy of a copy (Barasch, 5), an image of an image—a conjecture. According to E. H. Gombrich, it is because the “picture conferred up by art is unreliable and incomplete” (127) and takes advantage of our weakness for illusions (optical and others) that painting is condemned as a form of sorcery (126–127) and banished from Plato’s ideal state.

There are, of course, many problems with the concept of *mimesis* as it relates to visuals. For instance, Gombrich notes that art works do not always have to represent something. Moreover, Gombrich shows that the idea of the artist as an imitator of things in the phenomenal world (for example, more detailed imitation of human bodies in statues) was a historical development of art in Plato’s time. A competing and older conception of art saw the artist as creator, for the artist “has to know and construct a schema before he can adjust it

to the needs of portrayal” (116). In other words, Gombrich argues, the work of the artist is much closer to that of the artisan (carpenter) at whom Plato looks so benignly.

Shortcomings of the Standard Accounts of Plato

But the standard accounts of Plato’s concept of mimesis and of his injunctions against the visual are often too simplistic and ignore at least three sets of difficulties. First, not only is the use of images and of visual metaphors prevalent throughout the dialogues (e.g., metaphors of the chariot of the soul in *Phaedrus* and, in the *Republic*, of the cave, of the sun, and of the divided line), but visual metaphors are deeply embedded in the very concepts of Plato’s philosophy (e.g., the word “idea” means image [Marias, 46]).

Second, Plato is not categorically critical of painters and in fact uses painting analogies in some of his works. Barasch points out that Plato makes distinctions between illusionistic painters and poietic painters, approving of the latter as well as of Egyptian paintings, whose flat and rigid styles were supposedly closer to the permanent forms or Ideas (7, also Gombrich, 126). Poietic painters, in particular, could “let themselves be guided by what Homer described as divine” (7). According to one historical tradition, Barasch writes, Plato had in fact studied painting, and stylistic studies show that Plato had a competent knowledge of its processes (8). At times, Plato explicitly points out that what he is doing (say, defining *statesman* or *Utopia*) is like painting. For example, in the *Republic*, he explains that the ideal state must, in its development, pass metaphorically through the three stages of painting: “the first consists in preparing a clean, probably white surface; the second is the outlining, the drawing of a contour. . . . The third step is ‘shading and coloring’”

(Barasch, 9). And in *Statesman*, Plato again uses a painting analogy to argue for further elaboration of the definition of statesman (277c page 1043).

Finally, one line of Plato's thought finds a more important role for art and imitation. According to Barasch, this line of thought, although it cannot be considered anything more than an intimation, has been tremendously influential in various Platonisms, including much of medieval philosophy. Artists are sometimes able to see and represent the true forms (Gombrich, 156). This idea is intimated, for example, in Plato's speculations on cosmology. In his 'likely scenario' there is a creator (a *demiurge*, a term used to describe artisans involved in manual labor) who sees the permanent and ideal forms and makes the world of the senses as an inferior (Barasch writes "likely and analogous," 7) copy, or image, of the permanent world of forms.

Hermeneutic perplexities such as these strain our ability to discern a consistent set of Platonic doctrines regarding the visual. Some interpreters have argued that the importance of the dialogues does not rest in what they profess but in how they enact philosophy. Gerald Press, in *The Columbia History of Philosophy*, argues that viewing Plato's works as presentations of a consistent set of doctrines is bound to fail. He notes that Plato's Socrates frequently upholds episteme as the highest form of knowledge but just as frequently denies that he has any such knowledge. Plato goes out of his way to make discovery of his own views difficult (note that in no dialogue is there a character by the name of "Plato"). In various works, certain key ideas are strongly argued for, but in others just as strongly rejected. Most dialogues end with *aporias*, that is, without settlement of the issue that began the dialogue. What is more, the character of Socrates cannot be identified as the mouthpiece of Plato's doctrines since he is not present in all the dialogues, and in some plays only a

minor role. The more likely view of Plato's philosophy that emerges from the dialogues is that it is a kind of activity, not a set of credos; the dialogues embody the ideal philosopher (Socrates) as a "gadfly" (37) to politicians and others, an inquirer "aware of persons, facts, details and as morally serious, intellectually seductive, a theorist in and of the practical world" (35). According to Press, the dialogues aim to provoke thought to leave conclusions ambiguous, so as to challenge participants in the conversation (and readers) "to work out better answers" (43) and enact a way of life (33). The kind of knowledge found in the dialogues is not *episteme* as Plato defined it, then, but *theoria*—vision. Press writes,

Theoria expresses how we encounter the Forms (*Phaedrus* 250b, *Symposium* 211d, *Republic* 402d) and posits seeing with the eye of the soul as the kind of thinking characteristic of the philosopher (*Republic* 511c, *Theaetetus* 173e, *Philebus* 38b, *Timaeus* 47a). Thus vision is a kind of knowledge that *can* be found in the dialogues, but it is not the dogmatic, propositional sort usually desiderated. It is the sort of thing about which it can truly be said, as Socrates does about the Parable of the Cave, 'God knows whether it is true' (*Republic* 517b). (44)

Referring to this parable, Julian Marias argues that it is meant to show that "what happens to the man in the cave is something that can be narrated, and it is, in its most profound dimension, the essence of philosophy; and this, . . . is something more clearly arrived at in a narrative than in a definition. What happens to the philosopher, the drama of philosophy, is what makes clear the structure of reality" (50).

One disadvantage of looking at Plato's dialogues as works in progress enacting the activities of an ideal philosopher moving between ignorance and wisdom (Marias 56-58) is

loss of precision in terms of Plato's doctrines regarding visual presentation. But I think the gain is relevance and depth of insight into his overall approach to philosophizing, the set of historically contingent problems and questions to which he was responding,⁷ and a greater appreciation of philosophy as the process of directed but perhaps ultimately never-conclusive conversational inquiry aimed at education and in touch with important moral and political issues of the day (Press 34-35).

Looked at in this way, that is, freed of the weight of various Platonisms, Plato's injunctions against the visual can be handled more flexibly and more usefully. Plato is not a foe of art, but rather, as Iris Murdoch argues, "a great artist attacking what he sees as bad and dangerous in art" (13). Press's re-interpretation also permits us to appreciate the core insight of Plato's injunction against images without being carried away by the great speculative lengths he traversed to find and pull together the loose ends of his many theories.

So in this re-interpretation, what becomes of Platonic forms and Plato's injunctions against the visual?

Plato's injunctions become simply the following: Inanimate images—e.g., single photographs or single cartoons, not film or animation—may be fundamentally inappropriate for representing or understanding relations that obtain behind the visible. From this reading of Plato, it would be an entirely fruitless and dangerous strategy merely to use the inanimate visual of, say, a frowning person holding a product (or associating a product with something that evokes a negative feeling) in order to counter the effects of an advertisement arguing that ecstatic happiness can be obtained through the use of that product by showing a smiling

⁷ Hauser writes that he was responding in part to over-valuation of art as a result of the rise of the merchant class in Athens (90).

person holding the product (or associating a product with something that evokes a positive feeling). The strategy would fail entirely because although the effect of the original image in the ad may be muted or wiped out through the use of a counter image, the strategy concedes a much more important point: this use of image does not ask how we should go about trying to understand what makes us happy (or as Plato might put it, what a concept like “happiness” means).

At some level, inanimate images are profoundly inadequate to the task of giving us knowledge of an issue, a society’s political system, the living conditions of its citizens, its state of industrial development. The insight I attribute to a more playful and less doctrinaire Plato points to the likely inappropriateness of using exclusively or even predominantly images to help an audience understand topics such as Iran’s socio-economic or cultural situation, the condition of women, history, heritage, etc. But what *is in fact* an appropriate way of helping an uninformed audience understand and learn about these topics? The knowledge and background of my intended audience posed particular difficulties because this audience was not merely uninformed or merely holding innocuous preconceptions about the subject matter. Rather it held stereotypes. And stereotypes are a special—complex and particularly inveterate—form of misunderstanding and false knowledge.

Complications Involved in Countering Stereotypes

In *Stereotyping: The Politics of Representation*, Michael Pickering acknowledges the usefulness of the classical model and the remedy it implies but advocates going beyond the

classical view that “stereotypes = ‘distortions of the truth’” (75). According to the influential formulation of the classical model by Walter Lippmann, stereotyping

involves the various ways in which the need for sound, reliable knowledge of the complexities of the modern world is compromised by the reliance of public knowledge on inadequate and manipulated media representations. (18)

Thus, Lippmann attributed two contradictory features to stereotypes. On the one hand, he considered

stereotypes as inadequate and biased, as endorsing the interests of those who use them, as obstacles to rational assessment, and as resistant to social change . . . On the other hand, he regarded stereotyping as a necessary mode of processing information, especially in highly differentiated societies, an inescapable way of creating order out of ‘the great blooming, buzzing confusion of reality’ (ibid: 3). In this second, psychological sense, he equated stereotyping with broader patterns of typifying and representing, and indeed with our general means of thinking and making sense of the world and the peoples in it. (18)

Pickering argues that the classical model as constructed by Lippmann has had two important and harmful consequences for subsequent efforts to study and remedy stereotypes: (1) The model implies—and has historically led to the belief—that the remedy to stereotyping is

merely provision of accurate information and (2) the model sees stereotypes as a matter of oversimplification of complex facts.

Behind the simplistic link between stereotyped images and social roles there seem to be objectivist assumptions. In other words, the classical view seems to assume that there is an undisputed, agreed-on social reality about roles and cultural norms. Thus the remedy must remove the distorting clutter and, then, the reality of the role of, say, women in Iranian society will be made manifest. In fact, however, the social reality of gender relations and norms is itself a function of ideological clashes and negotiations. Pickering suggests that the concept of the Other, developed by feminists but also used extensively by postcolonial scholars, contributes profoundly to our understanding of stereotypes. For example, the concept of Other helps us see that characterizations of those who are Othered say a great deal about those who do the Othering. Moreover, the concept remains alert to historical, material, and cultural relations of power defining the terms of stereotyping (who can stereotype, what features will be stereotyped, how stereotyping changes).

My original goal of *countering* the stereotypes of Iranians had to be rethought. The goal of *countering* stereotypes as merely replacing one set of images with another set, even a more accurate or nuanced set, gives up on the much more important and urgent goal of teaching and learning how to avoid stereotyping.

Pedagogical Implications

The ability of images to disrupt stereotypes has important pedagogical implications that Pickering's arguments do not quite explore. A modified Socratic method as interpreted

by Press may help audiences and students counter stereotypes and avoid or resist stereotyping. This method has strong affinities with key tenets of critical pedagogy as articulated by Paulo Freire and Ira Shor.⁸

Press argues that Plato wanted to suggest or to guide a dialogue through dialectic, that is, Socrates' way of questioning (*elenchos*), orally conducted, to educate intellectuals to become philosophers as Plato understood that term (34-35). Press writes that dialogues often begin with questions raised by Socrates "on matters of importance" (43). The questions aim to draw out opinions and answers, many of which are systematically refuted (*elenchos*). This refutation will result in a crisis (*aporia*) "when insufficiency of answers is recognized." At this point in the dialogues, Socrates suggests a different, often higher, logical or intellectual perspective in order "to approach the problem (through play or myth)." After this suggestion, discussion returns to original difficulties, without coming "to final, specific, positive conclusions." Rather, the conversation partners of Socrates and the readers of Plato's dialogues are left to "work out better answers for themselves."

Images cannot aspire to represent a complex condition such as that of lower-middle class, Iranian, city-dwelling adolescents in a complex society, but by challenging stereotypes in their grossest manifestations—as simplified, contradiction-suppressing images—counter images may be able to result in Socratic *aporias* as one step—not in replacing one set of bad stereotypes with a set of good ones but—in a wider effort to *explore openly* how stereotypes are formed as well as how a different approach to acquiring knowledge of people—an approach that is free of stereotyping—can potentially be had. In the classroom, a study of

⁸ For Paulo Freire, critical pedagogy begins with the experiences of students, involves extended work on identifying problems, or what Freire calls, the contradictions in lived experience. Learning is envisioned as a dialogic process (praxis) that involves dialogic and sees the teacher as an artist (115).

images that represent stereotypes can serve many purposes, among them the purpose of helping students understand the very nature of stereotypes. That goal fits within the broader one of college writing courses that explore how ideas are formed.

A course unit I have prepared for first-year composition tries to combine critical pedagogy and Socratic dialectic. I briefly discuss stereotypes and ask students to discuss together and to work collaboratively to bring to class photographs or other inanimate images of stereotyped groups (immigrants, Arabs, feminists, Jews, African Americans, etc.). We discuss the photographs and explore the stereotypical elements. What is highlighted? What is considered positive, what negative? And how are negative and positive features indicated? For another class period, students bring to class several photographs of the same group of people that directly contradict some or all of the stereotypical elements. We discuss the ways in which the new photographs contradict the stereotypical elements. At this point in the unit, I introduce the idea that stereotyped images say a great deal about those who do the stereotyping. This topic is introduced as part of a special kind of rhetorical analysis, with which students should be familiar from previous units. In regular rhetorical analyses, students have worked on identifying the audience, context, and purpose of various texts and documents. The same will be done with these photos, but special emphasis is placed on the “photographer.” I put photographer between quotation marks because stereotypes often function subconsciously. And students are asked to speculate about the subconscious attitudes and purposes of the creator of the photograph. Students will try to see who the creator of the stereotype is (ethnicity, gender, class, nationality, etc.) by looking at what the creator sees in the stereotyped person. Students will then gather information about the

history of the relations between the stereotyped and the stereotyping group. Students end the unit by writing a paper about class activities and the research they have done.

Conclusion

For my presentation on Iran, the theoretical and ethical problems I encountered as I worked on the presentation helped me realize that photographs are incapable of conveying perhaps the most important type of information I wanted my audience to acquire, knowledge of the history and of the complex social and cultural conditions of Iran. Part of the problem had to do with what Gombrich notes: viewers bring their own interpretive frameworks to images. That's another way of saying that often viewers see in photos, for example, what they already know. Plato—or at least a reading of Plato along the lines that Press advocates—cautions against taking at face value the information that inanimate images seem to offer us and forgetting the experiences and stories or underlying relationships that have brought about the object an image may aim to represent. And theorists of stereotyping, such as Pickering, remind us that to counter stereotypes, we have to go beyond the stereotyped image to the interpretations, ideologies, and value-systems that the image serves and that stereotyping is just as much about the social groups that do the stereotyping (and their values) as it is about those who are stereotyped. If the goal is to go beyond replacing one set of stereotypes with another, that is, if the goal is to understand some aspect of the vast topic that is Iran, the audience has to be immersed in the narrative drama of the currents of thought with their roots in the material conditions and the historical development of Iranians. As part of that immersion—what Press would call philosophizing—photographs that counter

stereotypes of Iranian and Iranians can play a very powerful but limited role by disrupting certainties.

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CHAPTER 4. REVISITING THE POSTSTRUCTURALIST TURN IN CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

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Abstract

In this paper I argue that the influence of poststructuralism in English and composition studies undermines the goals of critical pedagogy by eroding the meanings of such terms as *oppression*, *liberation*, and *justice*. The paper tries to show that poststructuralism suffers from debilitating objectivist assumptions by examining key poststructuralist arguments of two prominent figures in cultural studies and English studies. First, I examine the work of Stuart Hall, who believes the connection between the discursive and the extradiscursive to have the status of a wager, that is, the status of an interesting but ultimately unimportant side issue that should not concern thinkers. In response, I analyze parts of his very influential cultural studies textbook, in which he tries to detail how he arrives at some of his most far-reaching conclusions. I show that Hall's arguments are untenable because his theory of signs in effect rejects the very possibility of signification. Next, I look at Stanley Fish's definition of rhetoric as "passionate partisan discourse" and

Fish's attack on the concepts of truth and objectivity and show that his arguments rest on the very objectivist assumptions he wishes to reject. In the last part of the paper, I argue that Hall and Fish's implausible views (and the many—systematic—misunderstandings of the views of thinkers such as Nietzsche, Foucault, Kuhn, and De Saussure) come from a failure to appreciate the far-reaching implications of the most important shift in the history of western philosophy, from a static view of knowledge to a dynamic one that foregrounds human life and action.

Introduction

In a founding text of critical pedagogy (CP), *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire writes that his theory of education can help “the oppressed unveil the world of oppression and through [. . .] praxis commit themselves to its transformation” (36). Every key term in this characterization—the oppressed, oppression, praxis, unveil, and transformation—refers to a cluster of theories, a set of problems and assumptions about issues such as freedom, justice, agency, and knowledge. But CP as conceptualized by thinkers such as Paulo Freire and Ira Shor has undergone a poststructuralist turn by thinkers such as James Berlin, Amy Lee, and others who believe this turn offers a more adequate theory of how CP should be enacted. I believe that that this poststructuralist turn, if not carefully tied to the notions of inquiry and praxis, presents insurmountable obstacles to enacting a CP. My specific argument is that notions of oppression as *objective* phenomena, and empowerment and

liberation as guiding concepts are *necessary* and *justified* as starting points for any enactment of CP.

In this paper, I will first outline my understanding of the formulation of CP by Freire and Shor as well as its later poststructuralist inflection. I will then use the writings of Stuart Hall and Stanley Fish to examine key problems introduced to CP by the focus of poststructuralism on the structure rather than the function of language. I will try to show that this focus represents a failure to absorb the full implications of a shift of paradigms in philosophy, which the closely related ideas of praxis in Marxism and inquiry in pragmatism reflect. Although poststructuralist insights can be incorporated in the idea of praxis, this incorporation has to be done critically and cautiously, else the generative concepts of CP—freedom, empowerment, agency—lose their meaning, and any enactment of CP cannot escape the charge of indoctrination.

Marxist Roots and Assumptions of CP

One of the goals of CP is the unveiling of oppression. Freire writes,

In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing. Projecting an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negates education and knowledge as processes of inquiry. (53)

In the banking model, students are being taught facts about what he calls an “oppressive reality” (33), a reality devoid of consciousness. Instead Freire wants to help students see the oppressive characteristics of this reality so that they can envision another. Shor uses the term “false consciousness” to refer to structures of thought that prevent the oppressed from recognizing their oppression (55). Both Freire and Shor use the language of Marxism and talk of the possibility of liberating (Freire, 49), unveiling “dominated consciousness” (85) and social “domination” (Shor, 87); helping students to “to truly know” (Freire, 85) reality and “objective facts” (Freire, 35), promoting “liberatory learning” (Shor, 268), and “empowering the object-subject switch” (113).

These terms trouble critical pedagogues who have attempted to reconcile Marxism with a poststructuralist framework. As a result, in scholarly texts examining CP, there has been a slow turning away from terms like oppression, false consciousness, empowerment, and liberation. For example, Berlin warns against aiming to help students unveil ideology so that they can see the real and true state of affairs in the world since as he writes “every pedagogy is imbricated in ideology” (“Rhetoric,” 492). Likewise, rejecting the “possibility of objective knowledge” (40), John Clifford argues,

Marx, like other humanists, believed that insight into the exploitative class struggle would eventually allow individuals to locate the real through the distorting fog of ideology. Althusser, however [with whom Clifford agrees], destigmatizes ideology as natural and inevitable as ineluctably woven into everything we do; consequently it cannot simply be expunged. (41)

People are always occupying subject positions. And Amy Lee in *Composing Critical Pedagogies* published in 2000 quotes Foucault to have said that “something called Power, . . . which is assumed to exist universally in a concentrated or diffused form, does not exist” (This is from Foucault, 1982, 788). She concludes:

We might, then, envision our classes as serving not to empower individual writers, but as forums for recognizing and analyzing when we, as writers, readers, teachers, or students, exercise power, for making power (like language) a focus of study rather simply a commodity to be produced and/or exchanged. When teachers claim their primary goal is to ‘empower my students’ or to ‘empower my students as writers,’ I often wonder, why? Is the end, the final hope, to produce better writers? More powerful *students*? (165)

I respect the work of poststructuralist critical theorists. Kenneth Bruffee expresses his commitment to the role of teachers as “agents of change” (650) when he argues for the need to permit and encourage “abnormal discourse” in the classroom. Berlin believes the “transformative intellectual” (“Literacy, 254) should be committed to “democratic practices in all areas of experience.” And Lee argues that poststructuralism’s “concentrating on language as discourse means attending not merely to the structural characteristics of language practice, but to social relationships and practices, to material conditions” (159). I, too, consider concepts such as ideology, subjectivity, and discourse and their refinements in poststructuralism to be positive developments, especially as Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu use those terms under the unifying concept of “practice.” But poststructuralism also

represents a serious inattention to the critical link between, on the one hand, “discursive practices” and, on the other, “social relationships and practices” and “material conditions.”

Problems of Knowledge in Poststructuralism

This inattention of poststructuralism has debilitating consequences for critical and liberatory theories such as cultural studies, which according to Chris Barker in *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, has the explicit goal of connecting “matters of power and politics, to the need for change and to representations of and ‘for’ marginalized social groups” (5). Cultural studies, Barker explains, has been heavily influenced by poststructuralism and aims to achieve its emancipatory political goals while recognizing, for example, that “meaning is unstable, being always deferred and in process. . . . [and] is the outcome of relationships between texts” (18). Cultural studies also accepts the poststructuralist rejection of the claim that “a degree of certain knowledge about an independent object world (a real world) is possible” (26). In a *Reader’s Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, Raman Selden writes that poststructuralists abandon the structuralist project of opening the secrets of the text because there are “unconscious, or linguistic, or historical forces which cannot be mastered” (109). These forces show that “The signifier floats away from the signified.” What this floating amounts to is what Barker calls the “rejection of a universal objective truth . . . based on the impossibility of word-world correspondence and therefore of accurate or adequate representation” (30). These positions of poststructuralism are, of course, in sharp contrast with basic premises of CP as formulated

by, for example, Freire.⁹ But the positions also seem self-contradictory. For example, after rejecting “universal objective truth,” Barker claims that cultural studies is in “search of improvements to the human condition” (29). But what *is* this human condition and its problems? Or he recommends the use of a “tape recorder to document” interviews because such use allows us to “understand the words of others for practical purposes” and “to predict the actions of others” (30). But how did these consequences follow? Where lies the difference between understanding what others say and making it up? Or between imagining people’s actions and predicting them? I will examine these inconsistencies in the context of analyzing Stanley Fish’s essay “Rhetoric.” But before I get to that examination, I would like to take a close look at the steps a poststructuralist cultural theorist has to take to arrive at these inconsistencies.

Key Problem with Hall’s Explanation of Representation

In examining the cultural studies textbook *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices* by Stuart Hall, a prominent cultural theorist, I am following the approach recommended by John Searle, who in *Mind, Language, and Society* suggests that often “we can find out more about what is going on in a culture by looking at undergraduate textbooks than by looking at the work of more prestigious thinkers. The textbooks are less clever at concealment” (20). Of course, I don’t accuse Hall of intentional concealment. But I agree with the implied claim in Searle’s statement that textbooks cannot pretend that the common-sense assumptions of their readers do not exist and have to respond to those

⁹ “Any situation in which ‘A’ objectively exploits ‘B’ . . . is one of oppression” (Freire, 37).

assumptions. I have chosen a work by Stuart Hall because he does not get carried away in what Terry Eagleton calls the “scandalous” obscurity of many works of radical cultural theory.

In *Representation* Hall writes that “culture is about ‘shared meanings’” (1) and that “Representation connects meaning and language to culture” (15). But what is representation? He writes, “representation is the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language. It is the link between concepts and language, which enables us to *refer* to either the ‘real’ world of objects, people or events, or indeed to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people and events” (17). Hall’s explanation of representation consists of three stages of claims that build a contradictory or meaningless conclusion. The problem arises from two sources: Hall (a) introduces concepts whose implications he ignores when convenient and (b) overextends a generalization. Before I begin, I should mention that Hall briefly acknowledges this problem. Saussure, Hall writes, “gave little or no attention to how this relation between signifier/signified could serve the purpose of what earlier we called reference—i.e. referring us to the world of things, people and events outside language in the ‘real’ world” (34). But Hall does not pursue the extremely far-reaching—as I will argue, paralyzing—implications of Saussure’s giving “little or no attention” to the relation between the sign and the referent.

In the first stage, Hall writes that “all sorts of objects, people, and events are correlated with a set of concepts or *mental representations* which we carry in our heads” (17). He calls this set of concepts the first system of representation (17), which is a *system* because it does not merely consist of “individual concepts, but of different ways of organizing, clustering, arranging, and classifying concepts, and of establishing complex

relations between them” (17). He identifies some of those “principles of organization” (18): “classifying according to sequence—which concept follows which—or causality—what causes what—and so on” (18). At this stage, he does not offer any explanation of the nature of those mental representations. For example, why do we have something called “principles of organization?” Or why do we have the principles of organization of sequence and causality and not some other alternatives?

In the second stage, he establishes the connection between the first system of representation and the second, which is “a common language” (18). He concludes that “the relation between ‘things’, concepts and signs lies at the heart of the production of meaning in language” (19). Here Hall explains that the relationship between spoken and written signifiers and the signifieds is arbitrary, that is, we can, as the speakers of any language, agree on using a word other than TREE to refer to a large plant, as users of other languages do indeed use a different word. He concludes, however, that therefore, in “indexical systems of representation [spoken and written language], the relationship between the sign, the concept, and the object to which they might be used to refer is entirely *arbitrary*” (21). This sweeping generalization is entirely unwarranted and extremely revealing because Hall has only established the claim that the choice of linguistic symbols for referring to concepts is arbitrary. This claim is not seriously disputed by anyone because it is a rather inconsequential observation. The claim does not establish the further—and if established, then truly groundbreaking—claim that the relationship between our mental concepts (also signs) and objects are arbitrary. In fact, there is strong evidence supporting the reverse. For example, historical linguistics makes a strong case for the claim that although a certain word for a certain concept may shed that concept and adopt another or drop out of the language

altogether, the concept usually finds another word to represent it. For example, C. M. Millward in *A Biography of the English Language* writes that in Old English “smierwan meant ‘anoint, salve, smear.’ With the advent of the French loan anoint, smear came to have connotations of crudeness and even contempt. Certainly today we could not speak seriously of a bishop’s smearing someone’s head with oil” (210). The point is the idea (concept) of what today we call anoint remains even if the word originally referring to it has changed. At any rate, the important point here is that what Hall says about arbitrariness of the signifier and the signified in indexical systems of representation (his second system) does not say anything, one way or another, about the arbitrariness of the relationship between the signified and the referent (his first system).

In preparation for the third stage of the explanation, Hall writes that “the meaning is constructed and fixed by the *code*, which sets up the correlation between our conceptual system and our language system in such a way that, every time we think of a tree, the code tells us to use the English word TREE, or the French word ARBRE” (21). “Codes,” he writes, “fix the relationships between concepts and signs” (21). “One implication of this argument about cultural codes,” he writes, “is that, if meaning is the result, not of something fixed out there, in nature, but of our social, cultural and linguistic conventions, then meaning can never be *finally* fixed” (23). The un-fixedness of meaning is a cornerstone of cultural studies, which uses the flexibility of meaning to argue that existing, unjust social relations are not based on any finally irremovable foundations.

In the third stage of his argument, Hall draws further unwarranted conclusions about the nature of the first system of representation. He quotes Culler as saying, “‘Not only does each language produce a different set of signifiers, articulating and dividing the continuum of

sound (or writing or drawing or photography) in a distinctive way; each language produces a different set of signifieds; *it has a distinctive and thus arbitrary way of organizing the world into concepts and categories*” (32, emphasis mine). In this third stage, the organization and categorization of the world is attributed to socially constructed, shared and arbitrary *codes*.

This statement contradicts Hall’s earlier claim from which he had begun his analysis: namely, that the concepts organizing and categorizing the world come from the first system of representation. In the third stage, it turns out (or rather, it is unproblematically stated) that the concepts (and “principles of organization”) in the first system of representation actually come from the second system of representation.

Aside from contradicting his earlier statements, Hall’s explanation is deeply flawed, for, among other reasons, his theory of representation is based on a self-contradictory definition of signs. According to Hall, mental concepts that organize our perceptions are produced by the codes that speakers of a language use to communicate those concepts, that is, the codes “produce” the very concepts that the codes signify, that is, codes signify themselves. As quoted previously, constructivists like Hall believe that “It is because a particular sound or word *stands for, symbolizes or represents* a concept that it can function, in language, as a sign and convey meaning—or, as the constructionists say, signify (signify)” (25,26). In other words, as a constructivist like Hall explicitly believes, the idea of “standing for” is built into the definition of “sign,” “signification,” and therefore, “meaning.” Thus, Hall’s theory of representation is based on a definition of signs that is literally meaningless. Or in effect, Hall is in effect arguing that there is no such thing as meaning. I don’t think arriving at this conclusion has been Hall’s intention, nor do I believe that he

would be interested in arriving at his idea of the ultimate impermanence of meanings at the cost of theoretical incoherence.

A close look at Hall's arguments in *Representation* also shows why Hall re-states Hume's problem (that there is an unbridgeable gap between the mind—symbols—and the external world) almost exactly when he states, "I regard the extradiscursive as a kind of wager. It's a kind of bet that the world exists, which cannot be proven in a philosophical sense" ("Reflections," 267-268). This view, shared by structuralism and its later formulations, relies heavily on an interpretation of Saussure's linguistics. Important observations and arguments against this interpretation are offered by Pierre Bourdieu and Barbara Hernstein Smith. According to Bourdieu, Saussure makes a two part move to arrive at the form of his scientific project: (1) he considers speech as the precondition of language but (2) he takes this priority of speech over language to be "purely chronological" and inverts "the relationship" between speech and language by leaving "the domain of individual or collective history in order to inquire into the logical conditions for deciphering" (23-24). Thus, language becomes "the precondition for the intelligibility of speech" (24). In the process, "from the strictly intellectualist standpoint of deciphering, Saussurian linguistics privileges the structure of signs, that is, the relations between them, at the expense of the practical functions" (24). Hernstein Smith calls the Saussurean move an instance of "Verbal animism, or the tendency to confuse the contingent effects of verbal forms with forces inherent in the forms themselves" (56).

Despite the problems to which Bourdieu and Hernstein Smith point, I consider Saussure's strategy of bracketing practices of language and focusing on its structure to be perfectly legitimate. Focusing on structure of language is as legitimate as focusing on

anatomy (say, as opposed to physiology) in biology. Saussure's choice was legitimate given the problems he meant to solve. But extending this strategic bracketing into a thoroughgoing Humean skepticism does not work for a theorist such as Hall who does want to say things about the social and cultural world. Similar, but more telling, poststructuralist misreadings are at work when Hall writes that Foucault rejects "any criterion of 'truth' in the human sciences in favour of the idea of a 'regime of truth' and the will-to-power (the will to make things 'true') " (51). But Foucault, given his research goals, *brackets* the issue of standards of truth in his works. In *Fearless Speech*, he explains that what he has

tried to do from the beginning was to analyze the process of 'problematization'--which means: how and why certain things (behavior, phenomena, processes) became a problem. . . . when I say that I am studying the 'problematization' of madness, crime, or sexuality, it is not a way of denying the reality of such phenomena. On the contrary, I have tried to show that it was precisely some real existent in the world which was the target of social regulation at a given moment. . . . For I think there is a relation between the thing which is problematized and the process of problematization. The problematization is an 'answer' to a concrete situation which is real. . . . There is a relation of thought and reality in the process of problematization. And that is . . . why . . . it is possible to give an analysis of a specific problematization as the history of an answer--the original, specific, and singular answer of thought--to a certain situation. (171-173)

I will return to the centrality of the issue of problematization later in the essay. But I end by noting that Hall's perspective on Foucault permits him to see the interactions of signifying systems and regimes of truth, but not standards of truth. In the last analysis, the status of Foucault's truth claims must remain a mystery to Hall. Despite acknowledging Foucault's emphasis on the concept of practice, Hall continues to reframe Foucault's work in terms of the Humean gap between the mind (thought processes and systems of signification) and the world. This gap, as I will argue later, is a telltale sign of residual objectivist thinking.

Objectivism of Stanley Fish

Another influential theorist whose work reflects residual objectivist thinking is Stanley Fish. Fish's attacks on the concepts of objectivity and truth have received a good deal of hearing in English Studies, especially in my field of rhetoric. For example, *The Rhetorical Tradition* ends with an essay by Stanley Fish entitled "Rhetoric." And Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg end their introductory section on Fish by writing, "Fish's roll call of the heroes of the interpretive turn is a helpful summary of the central theme of twentieth-century rhetorical theory" (1608). I would certainly agree that the theme mentioned is central. But the summary is also helpful in that it includes a gross *mistreatment* of that theme. If Bizzell and Herzberg think the essay is a helpful summary, then the essay should be able to serve as a point of departure for examining a few debilitating confusions in contemporary rhetorical theory about the definition, ingredients, scope, and function of rhetoric. In this section, I will compare the far-flung conclusions that Fish draws from his understanding of the collapse of the traditional epistemology with the rather panicked

conclusions that have been drawn from Nietzsche's works. Thus I will also closely analyze a short work by Nietzsche to show that despite the tremendous importance of his ideas, he has not undermined the very idea of the possibility of truth and objectivity. He has merely shown the untenability of certain characterizations of those concepts.

In "Rhetoric" Fish repeatedly and rightly insists that there has been a long-standing debate going on between rhetoric¹⁰ and philosophy: "I only wish to point out that the debate continues to this very day that its terms are exactly those one finds in the dialogues of Plato and the orations of the sophists" (1617). And he frames his arguments in terms of the first appearance of that debate in ancient Greece between Plato and Aristotle on the one hand and the sophists on the other. He points out quite correctly that debate resulted in a "win" for the Plato and Aristotle side. He traces variations of the same debate in different periods, for example, during Restoration in England and among the members of the Vienna Circle between World Wars.

Fish presents the view of foundationalist anti-rhetoricians or philosophers as people who want to communicate in ways that escape "partiality" and who want to determine and then affirm "what is absolutely and objectivity true" (1611). Antirhetoricians want to remove from language superfluities, equivocations, metaphors, ambiguity, redundancy, and indirection (1612) to prevent the creation of "wayward" thoughts. They want "plain unvarnished truth straightforwardly presented" (1613). Anti-rhetoricians also see divisions in the soul and contrast carnality with spirituality in the soul and passion with reason (1612). In the anti-rhetorical stance, the premise is that "any discourse must be measured against a

¹⁰ I should mention at the outset that because of the same interpretive turn in philosophy, the term *rhetoric* is contested. So when Fish and other theorists say "rhetoric is . . .," what they mean is "rhetoric should be defined or thought of as . . ."

stable and independent reality” (1615). According to Fish, the most influential proponents of the foundationalist approach are Plato and Aristotle. More recent theorists that Fish cites are Noam Chomsky, John Searle, and Jürgen Habermas.

So what exactly is rhetoric according to Fish? He writes that rhetoric is “passionate partisan discourse” (1611), and communication is “partial,” not “absolutely and objectively true” (1611). Rhetoric is for the “powerful but insidious appeal of ‘fine language,’ language that has transgressed the limits of representation and substituted its own forms for the forms of reality” (1613). Rhetoric gives the probable, or “what is likely to be so given particular conditions within some local perspective” (1614), more importance than the true. This position respects only “accidental as opposed to essential being. . . . the conditional and relative as opposed to the self-existent” (1614). Thus, Fish writes, true and good are context dependent, and there is “no master context . . . from the vantage point of which the differences could be assessed and judged” (1614). Since rhetoric is concerned with producing “belief and therefore . . . what, in a particular time and particular place, is true, [it] is the skill essential to the building and maintaining of a civilized society” (1614). In a defense of deconstructive thought, which Fish calls “supremely rhetorical” (1621), he writes, deconstruction “systematically asserts and demonstrates the mediated, constructed, partial, socially constituted nature of all realities, whether they be phenomenal, linguistic, or psychological.” Derrida’s deconstruction in particular denies “the possibility of a general theory—of an account that is itself more than an extension of some particular context or perspective.”

These are also teasingly vague.

What is meant by “passionate partisan discourse”? Does rejection of Platonism say anything one way or other about more or less trustworthy/reliable statements (truths)? But then what do *trustworthy* and *reliable* mean? Is deconstruction a theory? Is the statement “deconstruction denies ‘the possibility of a general theory’” *not* a general theory? What does it mean that language transgresses the limits of representation and “substitute[s] its own forms for the forms of reality”? Why is the narrow local perspective to be privileged over the general or universal perspective? Is not rhetoric’s respect for the “accidental as opposed to essential being” an acceptance of the Platonic categories to begin with?

Fish’s views become clearer in his discussion of McCloskey and Kuhn. Fish defends McCloskey’s claim that “‘assertions are made for purposes of persuading some audience’ and that, given the unavailability of a God’s-eye view, ‘this is not a shameful fact,’ but the bottom line fact in a rhetorical world’ (1618). Fish then claims McCloskey’s view is comparable to that propounded by Kuhn in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, which according to Fish, argues “there is no principled (i.e., nonrhetorical) way to adjudicate the dispute” between competing observations made from different set of “tacit assumptions and beliefs” (or paradigms). Fish believes that Kuhn’s position means that

science does not proceed by offering its descriptions to the independent judgment of nature; rather, it proceeds when the proponents of one paradigm are able to present their case in a way that the adherents of other paradigms find compelling. In short, the “motor” by which science moves is not verification or falsification, but persuasion. Indeed, says Kuhn, in the end the force of scientific argument “is only that of persuasion” (p. 94). (1618)

When there are disagreements, the highest standard is the agreement of the “relevant community” (1618). Thus, Fish writes we have no access to neutral language, or neutral facts,

the report on the world as it is seen from within some particular situation; there is no other aperspectival way to see and no language other than a situation-dependent language—an interested, rhetorical language—in which to report. (1619)

From all this, Fish concludes that Kuhn’s position leaves us “in a world of epistemological and moral anarchy”(1619). But how did Fish end up in “a world of epistemological and moral anarchy”? Kuhn certainly does not think science is in crisis. In “Objectivity, Value Judgment, and Theory Choice” (published 1977), he writes, nothing he has argued rejects canons or criteria of scientific discovery, which are of paramount importance for determining the adequacy of a theory: “accuracy, consistency, scope, simplicity, and fruitfulness” (278). But since there are levels of accuracy and sometimes the criteria may be in conflict (for example, a theory may be more accurate than another but less consistent with previous theories), he writes (say in abnormal science, which involves different paradigms) “one must go beyond the list of shared criteria to characteristics of the individuals who make the choice” (280). Individual history of past experience in a field, historical conditions, and prevalent political views may dispose scientists to choose one theory as opposed to another, “without thereby in the least jeopardizing their adherence to the canons that make science scientific.” In other words, as mentioned on the same page quoted by Fish,

To discover how scientific revolutions are effected, we shall therefore have to examine not only the impact of nature and of logic, but also the techniques of persuasive argumentation effective within the quite special groups that constitute the community of scientists. (94)

Thus, sometimes the values that scientists have already agreed on and turned into standards and rules are no longer sufficient, and scientists have to engage in arguments that involve not application, but *assessment*, of those and other values. I think Fish's sense of anarchy comes from his tacit acceptance of positivism or objectivism. That is, he thinks that science—the supposed paradigm of rationality—should concern itself merely with discovering facts, because values cannot be rationally assessed (more on this towards the end of the paper). Fish is not entirely at fault here: the details, the significance, and the all-pervasive implications of the topic of the rational assessment of values are not well known in the western philosophical tradition because of the long-standing framework of Aristotelian epistemology.

Fish's reaction to Kuhn's arguments about paradigms and truth is reminiscent of the panicked reaction of many thinkers in the 19th century to Nietzsche's sustained and comprehensive challenges to objectivism and positivism. Nietzsche foresaw the complete collapse of Aristotelian epistemology (objectivism) and metaphysics (theology), and he anticipated the onset of nihilism in Europe. His philosophical work is an attempt at completing that collapse and to see if a new goal and approach to life can be envisaged. I am going to outline some of Nietzsche's arguments in "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral

Sense” because they can help clarify the problems I see in Fish’s position on rhetoric. This is an early essay in Nietzsche’s body of work (1873), but it lays the foundation for his later explorations of some old themes in philosophy and especially in moral theory. The essay is a systematic and unforgiving attack on the Platonic and Aristotelian philosophical projects.

Nietzsche begins with a series of truth claims about the world: Humans are in a life-and-death struggle for self-preservation. Physical weakness has strengthened their powers of cunning and dissimulation. They wish to live socially out of boredom and need. To live socially, they create a “universally valid and binding designation for things” (1172). Original laws of truth come from this universalizing function of language. Humans care about the truth only as long as it helps preserve them or give them pleasure (1173).

He then turns his attention to Plato and Aristotle and argues against their position that words and language are “not congruent with things” (1173). Nietzsche is referring to and rejecting Aristotle’s belief that Humans have a “faculty” called mind, which is of the same stuff (or form or essence) as the stuff (or form or essence) of reality. This mind (subject), according to Aristotle, can know, grasp, or become one or merge with reality (object). Against that view, Nietzsche states that language is not “the adequate expression of all realities” (1173). There is no “‘truth’ of the grade” (1173) Aristotle stipulates. In other words, against the Aristotelian view that the forms or essences of reality can be “defined” in words by the mind through a process of classification and exclusion (*ratio*), Nietzsche argues that the true state of affairs in the world does not *designate* our words, which show a remarkable set of arbitrary categories and differentiation within (e.g., gender for nouns in German) and among languages, “first for this, then for that property of a thing” (1173). From this, Nietzsche moves to adopt a Kantian view of knowledge (which he elaborates

later) to the effect that we do not know the Kantian “thing in itself” (1173) or reality as it really is (without perspective and without a knowing mind).

So what do we know? Nietzsche claims we know words in their relation “to men” (1173). We also know the effects of things. He calls those effects *metaphors* (1173) or *impressions* (1175) or *images* (1173) or *illusions* (1174). Thus, he writes—and here is Nietzsche’s very scientific theory—“To begin with, a nerve stimulus is transferred into an image: first metaphor. The image, in turn, is imitated in a sound: second metaphor” (1173). It is, he writes, like a totally deaf person who sees sand figures created by “vibrations of the string” and exclaims he now knows what “sound” means (1173-1174). Likewise, we think we know trees and colors, but all we know are “metaphors,” which do not really correspond “to the original entities” (1174), here “original entities” being his rephrasing of Kant’s “thing in itself.” In other words, Nietzsche considers and rejects an early version of the correspondence theory of truth as visual representation (or isomorphism), not as a formal requirement of true statements about the world. His conclusion from all this is another chipping away at objectivism: “Thus if scientists do not quite make up things from thin air,” they at least do not create them from “the essence of things” (1174).

Nietzsche offers another argument against objectivism. He writes, words are created from removing distinguishing differences among items (say, millions of leaves) and designating the “similarities” (1174). He notes in passing that this activity of the mind is the source of the misguided Platonic and Aristotelian idealism. Nietzsche returns to Kant’s views on the “thing in itself” and concludes that nature has no forms, no concepts, and no species (he is talking Aristotelian genera and species), “only an X which remains inaccessible and undefinable for us” (1174).

So again, what grade of truth is accessible to us? Nietzsche writes truth seems to be merely imaginative effects (metaphors or illusions) transformed through our human perceptual apparatuses, which after long “usage” become “fixed, canonical and binding” (1174), that is, we forget they are metaphors or imaginative effects. To use the usual metaphors (that is, “fixed conventions”) is to tell the truth. These views, of course, do not in any way reject scientific knowledge once it has been detached from its dogmatic Aristotelian justifications. Science does not aim to define essences. Definitions in science are operational. Science is interested in identifying regularity and similarities in nature. It purposely seeks out “anomalies” to explain them in terms of what is known and regular.

He writes, given this long usage, humans in different societies create a “*schemata*” of universal (socially shared) concepts and create a “pyramidal order” that is regular, classified, and logical, a “new world of laws, privileges, subordinations, and clearly marked boundaries” (1175). Here truth means “never violating the order of caste and class rank” (1175).

Our knowledge is of this form: we “make up” a definition, say, mammals; then we inspect an animal, say, a camel, and declare the camel to be a mammal. Nietzsche writes, this is “indeed truth,” but “of limited value” (1175) because it is “a thoroughly anthropomorphic truth which contains not a single point which would be ‘true in itself’ or really and universally valid apart from man” (1175). We think when an “image” (impression or effect) has been repeated through many generations “on the same occasion every time for all of mankind” that the relationship between “the original nerve stimulus to the generated image” is causal (1176). This may be a form of knowing, but it does not satisfy Plato’s idea of knowledge.

Finally, the regularity is there only because “all of mankind” has the “same sense perception” (1176). Thus, we know no laws of nature, only its effects in terms only of what we bring to them (as Kant argues): “time and space, and therefore relationships of succession and number” (1177).

The central theme of Nietzsche’s argument is anthropomorphism. Aristotle and Plato claimed to have discovered a “moral universe,” a universe that is infused with values. They believed what humans think they value may not match the values of Reality unless they come to know or to Reason (as Plato and Aristotle define knowledge and Reason). If they do, they will see that what is good and what is true converge. In effect, the effort was geared at removing intractable value judgements. Nietzsche argues that there is no basis whatever for this world picture. The universe itself does not have any values one way or other. We cannot know anything without infusing it with our human capacities, needs, and activities, in other words, with human values. But he has a genuine suspicion that the *human* in this picture if seen outside the conventional (and ignorant) schemata humans have built to describe themselves and the world, may be “pitiless, greedy, insatiable, and murderous” (1172), that in other words, humans (presumably like Nietzsche), if they come to a clearer understanding of their condition, may see that they are “hanging in dreams on the back of a tiger.”

I don’t sense this fear in the complacent arguments of Stanley Fish. His prose, despite its purported openness to “partisan, passionate discourse,” strikes me as expressing more nervousness of a game player than genuine distress. Thinkers like Plato and Nietzsche seem to be more aware of and concerned about the brutality of human history and the depths to which humans sink to resolve their differences and fulfill their desires: invasion, enslavement, torture, execution, degradation, oppression, etc. over generations. So

Nietzsche wants to understand the tiger better without relying exclusively on how the tiger describes itself. The tiger is acting according to urges (needs or drives, which are forms of basic *value*) that are nearly beyond its ken and control, its will to power (to life), its desire to control a portion of its environment, etc. In the process, it does (and says) what it has to do; for example, it forgets that the metaphors it has built around itself are mere metaphors, that is, it lies to itself. In his other works, Nietzsche attempts to peel away those metaphors.

Of course, Nietzsche's arguments presuppose certain theories about how the world is, knowledge and truth, suffering, human needs and drives, something called "will to power," etc. Those theories in turn presuppose external realism as a framework of intelligibility. And at least in this essay, he seems to have difficulty detaching himself from the static Aristotelian world picture. In other words, he does not quite appreciate the suggestion implicit in his views: that humans are already in the world engaged in *activities*.

Nietzsche and philosophers after him take the idea of the "will to power" seriously. They do not *declare* that knowledge is a mask for power; they want to know *whether* knowledge is a mask for power. At the very least, they want to know the relationship between knowledge and power (Again, will to power is a drive, that is, a basic value).

So for example, undertaking a Nietzschean project of peeling away, Foucault in *The Order of Discourse* looks at discourse as an activity or practice (something people do) and identifies three sets of procedures that control, restrict, and exclude discourse: (1) "the forbidden speech, the division of madness, and the will to truth" (1463); (2) the definition and "fecundity" of the author, "the multiplicity of commentaries," and "the development of a discipline" (1467); and (3) "speech-rituals, societies of discourse, doctrinal groups, and social appropriations" (1469). The truth claims Foucault makes about the constraints on discourse

are part of a larger project of identifying and peeling away layers of metaphor making up our Nietzschean conventional schemata, which seem perfectly natural and “true.” The ultimate goal of Foucault is a better understanding of the intersection of knowledge and power.

And despite what Fish might think, it is not just continental philosophers who take the Nietzschean “suspicion” seriously. Contemporary analytic philosophers and philosophers of science are also in agreement. For example, In *Construction of Social Reality*, John Searle mentions some of the problems that confront what we can know:

vagueness, indeterminacy, family resemblance, open texture,
contextual dependency, the incommensurability of theories,
ambiguity, the idealization involved in theory construction,
alternative interpretations, the underdetermination of theory by
evidence, and all the rest of it. (167)

However, philosophers such as Searle also note that the debunking of the Platonic theory of knowledge by philosophers such as Nietzsche has merely discredited “a misconception of the relationship between truth and reality” (175). As I will try to show later in this essay, the main contemporary currents of philosophy have long adopted the main arguments of Nietzsche. In the next section, I will try to show that from arguments similar to Nietzsche’s, Fish’s far-flung conclusions cannot be drawn.

Stanley Fish’s formulation of the development of rhetoric suffers from several shortcomings. I will mention and respond to them briefly. First, in rejecting the Platonic/Aristotelian epistemological solutions, Fish also rejects the *problems* they were trying to solve, namely the possibility and practice of deception in discourse. This is a

serious mistake that much more thoroughgoing, doggedly consistent thinkers like Nietzsche and Foucault do not make. Experiences of mistake, deception, and self-deception are commonplace phenomena and practices of human life. Fish is making a mistake along the lines of confusing the theory of gravity and forces of attraction among bodies for the *experience* of gravity. This mistake is connected to a second: Fish thinks the only type of knowledge to be had is contingent and context based. Deconstructive thought, which Fish calls “supremely rhetorical” (1621) “systematically asserts and demonstrates the mediated, constructed, partial, socially constituted nature of all realities, whether they be phenomenal, linguistic, or psychological.” Elsewhere he defends Derrida’s deconstruction for denying “the possibility of a general theory—of an account that is itself more than an extension of some particular context of perspective.” A rather glaring problem with these statements is that they are (a) extremely broad general theoretical statements that (b) deny the possibility of making general theoretical statements. The self-contradictory character of this thesis by Fish is also noted by David Detmer in *Challenging Postmodernism: Philosophy and the Politics of Truth*. Detmer quotes Fish as having written, “the mechanisms of persuasion, like everything else, are context-specific” (quoted in Detmer, 249). In response, Detmer asks, “Is this dictum itself context-specific?” (249-50). Of course in a sense everything happens in some context or other. But Fish draws conclusions from this observation that simply do not follow because contexts can be large or small, and they in part depend on our activities and the direction of our thoughts. For example, I am a member of a small family, but I am also a member of a large land-grant university community. Am I a member of the one or the other? Of course, the answer is both. Fish ignores such situations and arbitrarily focuses on small contexts, which he then arbitrarily declares to be completely incommensurable. But there

are some very large contexts, so large in fact to qualify as universal, earth for example with its gravity, air, rotation, etc. Nietzsche notes that all our knowledge is anthropomorphic; some characteristics of life he notes apply to “all of mankind.” Moreover, people can have multiple perspectives on an issue from different contexts. As mentioned, we do not fill out only one context; we do several, and we connect them intellectually and physically. We can have outsider perspectives without being outside *all context*; for example, we can climb a hill and get a broader view of a landscape or a road without thereby thinking that we have exited all context or that we are looking at the world from the viewpoint of God. Moreover, some perspectives are better than others given the task at hand. Thus, a sweeping rejection of the possibility of the usefulness of examining issues and claims from broad contexts seems unjustified.

Third Fish believes that the debunking of the Aristotelian epistemology has somehow brought in its wake “epistemological and moral anarchy.” I believe that view reflects residual positivistic thinking. At best Fish has shown us that our old paradigm of rationality has been shown to be inadequate to the task of helping us decide between competing value-infused beliefs. From that proposition, he concludes that we have no choice but to live and think under the banner of irrationality. But that conclusion accepts the way the old paradigm defines rationality. The paradigm offers Fish an either/or dilemma. Either we have a rational, value-infused world and rationality is our knowledge of this world, or we have nothing but chaos and irrationality. Fish, first rejects the paradigm but then forgets that he has rejected the paradigm and accepts the “or” part of the dilemma. His position is merely a corollary of objectivism, the very view he claims to be rejecting.

Finally, Fish simply refuses to get into the details of his interpretive community. His discovery that evaluation happens (standards are set or found) in the context of the relevant and qualified interpretive community is not new. Karl Popper and other philosophers of science have discussed this issue for some time now. Popper's re-definition of objectivity as intersubjectivity is precisely a recognition of the community-based or social character of science. The question is and has always revolved around the values of the community, how they are arrived at, and how they are related to the values of other communities, some of which may be occupied by some or all of the same participants in the first community, and some of which may have been occupied by people in the past. For example, there may be important connections between the values of biologists now and those of 150 years ago. Fish may be surprised at the commonalities among those communities; he may also be surprised to find out that the differences may be perfectly within our ability to understand. By placing the responsibility for standards of judgement on the community, Fish has merely pushed the question of how those standards of judgment are arrived at one step back. The question can be asked in a slightly different way: How does the *community* arrive at those standards? Even foundationalist philosophers, when seen from Fish's perspective, can be argued to have always been arguing for standards in the relevant community without emphasizing the community aspect of their arguments. The issue of "the relevant community" was not considered worth exploring by those thinkers. But for all practical purposes they were arguing for what their community should have accepted as standards. Fish's insight that what applies to one community may not apply to another is worth exploring. But his failure to appreciate the necessity of taking the further step of arguing for those standards is an

unqualified setback for scholarship. Fish extends his problematic reliance on community as the source of values in judgement to a much more problematic reliance on culture.

Fish's views have broad implications for politics, activism, and critical pedagogy. In *After Theory*, Terry Eagleton points out that Fish's arguments against theory are ultimately rooted in a characterization of a broad conceptualization of community that Fish calls culture. So according to Fish, theories are supposed to give us "fundamental reasons" for our way of life (54). But Fish argues that this mediating function of theory is untenable. Rather, "What counts as a legitimate reason or a valid idea will be determined for you by your way of life itself" (54). Eagleton calls this a new version of *fideism*, the idea that "your life is based on certain beliefs which are immune to rational scrutiny" (55). A consequence of viewing culture in this way is that it permits "no rational grounds for judging between cultures." Our judgements are always made from within our cultures, not "from a disinterested point outside it." Eagleton is quick to note the supposed advantage that this view seems to offer. Since our beliefs are rooted in culture and "culture has no solid basis," those beliefs become contingent. This view seems to open possibilities for political intervention because it seems to promise that there are no absolute foundations for things in society being the way they are. Eagleton notes that the anti-theoretical view fails to account for human phenomena that go beyond cultural boundaries, for example, "grief, compassion, right-angled triangles or the concept of something being the case" (56). He also notes that anti-theorists would have to make implausible arguments to justify, for example, why they would oppose torture if torture is a cultural phenomena like playing tennis. Anti-theorists would say the reasons for opposing torture are also contingent and have "nothing to do with the way human beings are, since human beings are no way in particular." Pushing Fish to confront the implications of

his views on torture, Eagleton writes, Fish may have to admit that his culture happens to oppose extracting confessions from people by “holding their heads down in water,” but other cultures may not oppose this technique, and if so “then more power to . . . [their] elbow” (57). To avoid this position, Fish’s position leaves him no room but to move to the other extreme and reject torture by frankly admitting that his position is a form of cultural imperialism. In Fish’s view, “Moral values, like everything else, are a matter of random, free-floating cultural traditions” (57). Noting that we have been since Nietzsche systematically eroding the metaphysical underpinnings of epistemology, Eagleton argues that Fish makes the mistake of replacing “one kind of anchoring with another. It is now culture, not God or Nature, which is the foundation of the world” (58). Although culture seems less stable than previous Nature, God, or Reason (as defined by Plato and Aristotle), nevertheless, members of the kind of culture Fish invokes cannot “peer outside it” (59) and “what we would see if we could peer beyond it would itself be determined by the culture.” In this view, culture does become a bottom line, albeit a “bumpy” one. This Culture is just as inevitable as previously Nature was. Eagleton also argues that Fish seems to be working with a rather monolithic as well as hermetic conception of culture. But of course, people from different cultures interact. I was raised in Iran but have lived most of my life in the United States. I cannot unproblematically appeal to some cultural values of Iran or of the United States to make sense of my world. As postcolonial theory emphasizes, this condition is perhaps far more widespread than the condition of the person who has been born and raised in a hermetic and monolithic cultural environment. Moreover, the values and traditions within a single culture are by no means entirely coherent. An Iowa student born and raised on a farm will have conflicting concerns to a range of cultural traditions, values,

and allegiances. As John Searle in *Rationality in Action* argues even what a single person at a moment in his or her history values is not necessarily coherent. For example, he writes that at the moment of writing, there are several courses of action he would like to make (be in Paris but visit someone, and others). But he cannot do all of those things, and he has to make a decision. The question of how Searle makes those decisions is precisely the extremely important question that Fish relinquishes.

Conclusion: Critical Pedagogy, Beyond Poststructuralism

As with Stanley Fish, at bottom, Hall's wager about the extra-discursive, Barker's discomfort with the idea of objectivity and facts, Berlin's and Lee's concerns about presuming that they can help their students lift the veil of false consciousness and see the truth, and beyond their collective reluctance to use words such as justice, freedom, and empowerment show that these theorists are operating from within an objectivist framework. *When* objectivity is *equated with* objectivism and yet there is no "'truth' of the grade" (Nietzsche, 1173) objectivism requires, then objective claims cannot be made and some *alternative* explanations for research and activism must be sought. But those *alternative* explanations remove the very possibility of praxis, for if oppression is merely an ideology or a dominant discourse and there is no way to judge the condition of oppression objectively, what prevents one from arguing that perhaps what the "oppressed" lack is merely a more naturalized dominant ideology that helps them see their oppression as, say, contentment? In fact what can CP be but indoctrination if peoples' (or students') understanding of their situation—say, their suffering—can only be ideological but not accurate? If as Lee claims,

poststructuralism's "concentrating on language as discourse means attending not merely to the structural characteristics of language practice, but to . . . material conditions" (159), then what does *attending* really mean? And what are those conditions?

I think the objectivist framework underlying some versions of poststructuralism and CP *reflects* an inadequate appreciation of a gradual seismic shift in philosophy for the last hundred and fifty years. In the new landscape, knowledge and language are accompaniments and products of activity. In analytic philosophy, Ludwig Wittgenstein writes that "the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life" (1107). In continental philosophy, Friedrich Nietzsche argued somewhat dramatically for a philosophy of life in which "truth [is] the illusion that helps us cope with life" (Safranski, 349). Karl Marx's notion of praxis—"what else is life by activity" (315) has perhaps been the best known example of this shift. Later views can be seen in the works of American pragmatists, and more recently in continental philosophy in that of Martin Heidegger for whom certain types of knowledge of things for humans already in the world comes from their use in activities (99). These views have been expounded more recently in Foucault's writings on discursive practices, Habermas's on communicative action, Bourdieu's theories of practical reason and action, John Searle's expansion of speech act theory to rationality in action (in *Rationality in Action*), the works of feminist philosophers of science such as Helen Longino, Sonda Harding, and Donna Haraway, and in other fields.

As an emerging unifying theme, the concept of practice (activity, action, praxis, inquiry, etc.) is riddled with problems. But it has the distinct advantage of clarifying a few paralyzing confusions introduced by logical positivism and some versions of poststructuralism. Because pragmatism is the school of thought most closely associated with

this unifying concept, I will present my understanding of the goals and underlying assumptions of CP in terms of Dewey's pragmatism.

In *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, Dewey argues that organisms and their environment are always in a state of flux. In order to maintain life, organisms seek equilibrium when they come out of balance with their environment, say, when they are hungry. Through searching organisms form a store of knowledge, in some organisms in the form of useful habits and in the human organism also in the form of a store of memories (23-41) and the use of language, which has come about through communication in communal activities. Dewey calls the activity through which knowledge is gained inquiry. In *How We Think*, he identifies five steps to inquiry "(i) a felt difficulty; (ii) its location and definition; (iii) suggestion of possible solutions; (iv) development by reasoning of the bearings of the suggestion; (v) further observation and experiment leading to its acceptance or rejection; that is, the conclusion of belief or disbelief" (72-76).

Several features of inquiry relate to CP and bear mentioning. Of central importance to thinkers who use activity as a unifying theme is the issue of problematization. The beginning point of inquiry is the problem, which arises from already on-going activities. Understanding the problem embeds an understanding of the activity one is engaged in. The problem also gives direction to inquiry. Some features of the world and certain activities become relevant under a certain description. A soldier may see the same person as an enemy, a child as a father, etc. Finally there is a close mutual interconnection between the formulation of the problem and subsequent activity including theory formation. Without this mutual adaptation of the problem and subsequent activity, theories of inquiry, praxis, etc. can easily be understood as variations of instrumental rationality (Hickman, 78). The importance of the

problem can be seen in Foucault's pre-occupation with the question of problematization, in Freire's "problem-posing" methodology, and in CP's sensitivity to the question of "oppressive reality," a reality—that is, a reality under a description given a set of problems and ensuing activities—that does not match the student's needs and interests. This type of reality represents a *concealment* of activity: the problem being solved, the people for whom an issue is a problem, why it is a problem, the solutions that have been adopted, etc. Instead, it presents information about the world as something already discovered and explained, not as theories (part of the activity of inquiry), but as given, disconnected, and meaningless facts.

But nothing in an activity theory of inquiry and praxis eliminates facts and objective descriptions. And the process works at the level of Davidson's prior and passing theories (480) or at the level of "grand narratives" some postmodern theorists attack. These theories are confronted with an overwhelming array of theoretical problems. To the list of the problems of knowledge Searle mentions,¹¹ I add hierarchical patterns of communication, individual, community- and culture-wide prejudices of some scientists, institutional obstacles to free thinking, etc. To say that we cannot have knowledge because all knowledge is riddled with these problems is simply a restatement of objectivism. The knowledge we can have has these problems, but it is still knowledge. Within an activity given a set of problems, there are aspects of the world that stand out or light up (as Heidegger would say) for our inspection. If the activity is collective and language based, we can point to those aspects of the world. If the activity is focused (delimited in range), there can be a great degree of convergence on actors' perceptions and discussions of the aspects of the world that are lit up. And in fact we are engaged in a myriad of collective, focused activities, and there is great uniformity in the

types of problems we encounter: providing for food, health, shelter, family, some exercise, the need to coordinate activities, etc. and in the types of solutions we have adopted and are adopting.

Of course, there is no such a thing as oppression as an a-perspectival, eternal phenomenon. But, to quote Nietzsche again, an objective truth of that “grade” seems unnecessary. Oppression as an objective fact can be discovered in the same way that cheating in the activity of a game can be discovered. There are rules, there are ways of enforcing the rules, there are standards of judgement for interpreting the rules, people are selected to make judgements, roles are assigned to players, and then people play. And a lot of people watch. Social life is a huge activity based on a set of related problems, and a set of related solutions that highlight certain aspects of the world. And some people cheat, objectively. My family tells me that in Iran low-level medical staff routinely demand bribery before providing services. That’s a form of objective (but not objectivist) cheating that leads to suffering and death. In most industrialized countries, with about 6% percent of the GDP all people receive medical care. In the U.S., health-care companies get a portion of the GDP roughly equal to 1.2 trillion dollars (or 12% of the GDP) without caring for about 40 million uninsured people. That’s a 600 billion dollar profit obtained at the cost of unimaginable, preventable, objective suffering on the part of many of the 40 million uninsured.

The point of establishing our right as CP theorists to use words like *oppression*, *freedom*, and *empowerment* is not that we should replace students’ “oppressive reality” (Freire, 33) with our version. But clarifying this starting point will help us with our theoretical and practical priorities. It gives us a center of gravity so that we don’t place equal

¹¹ See Page 108.

importance by, for example, focusing exclusively on applying or revising abstract theories in the classroom when there are objective structural patterns in the university inimical to everything CP stands for. Critical pedagogy is rooted in the *problems* of injustice and freedom, it is informed by a theory of praxis that recognizes people are active/inquiring agents.

The structuralist and poststructuralist turn in critical pedagogy has offered some important insights, but by refusing to see systems of signification in a broader context of dynamic human activity and by focusing instead on static structures of signification it has attenuated important concepts like freedom, oppression, and agency. Worse, by removing the idea of inquiry as an activity, it has created a gap between world—here discursive formations—and embodied people and their non-discursive, material conditions and merely represents another face of objectivism.

From the point of view of the process of inquiry, all terms refer to the problematics of inquiry. If inquiry is an activity, and activities are designed to accomplish certain goals in response to certain problems, then CP's goal of engaging students in the process of inquiry involves an assessment of the problems that have prompted the activity.

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CHAPTER 5. GENERAL CONCLUSION

The history of thought in the West has come full circle; we are where we began, but perhaps we are wiser for having gone around the circle. The master tradition is finally being demoted from its position of being a comprehensive framework for science, art, politics, and ethics, to being one set of interesting and important ideas among others. But although the master tradition is being retired, the key problems of ethics and politics to which the master tradition represented a set of responses still confront us. We still have to make good moral and political decisions, to explain phenomena and to interpret signs, to communicate effectively with each other, to organize and divide tasks and to distribute resources fairly, etc. More than a hundred years ago, Nietzsche predicted the collapse of the master tradition and feared that the world would sink into nihilism. It is still an open question whether that fear was justified. But I don't think there is any reason to doubt that this collapse has created a great deal of distress. Given this collapse, we are still trying to understand how we form one set of ideas—values—which through the work of feminist thinkers among others, we are beginning to see in all our activities and thoughts. The recognition of this presence in science and rationality has been particularly disturbing to some thinkers. For example, Karl Popper in *Open Society and Its Enemies* has to admit that his belief in rationalism is based on an “irrational faith in reason” (231). Examining the view expressed by Popper, Robert Hollinger in *The Dark Side of Liberalism* writes,

Only science provides knowledge; moral judgments—basic, categorical, ultimate judgments—fall outside the scope of science; therefore they fall outside the scope of knowledge; therefore they are ‘mere’ opinions, expressions of subjective preferences or personal tastes. Thus, since science can neither prove nor disprove the claim that genocide is immoral, it is merely a matter of opinion that it is; and the opinion that it is not is of equal weight, is equally rational, and has equal moral force. (87)

We have had to take another good look at long-dismissed theories of emotions, such as the theory examined by Martha Craven Nussbaum, who argues that “emotions are forms of evaluative judgment that ascribe to certain things and persons outside a person’s own control great importance for the person’s own flourishing” (22). Reflecting on the memory of her mother’s death, she writes,

It was my thought that was receiving, and being shaken by, the knowledge of her death. I think that if we say anything else we lose the close connection between the recognition and the being shaken that experience gives us. The recognizing and the upheaval, we want to say, belong to one and the same part of me, the part with which I make sense of the world. (45)

This view holds that emotions are not something separate from and in contrast to thoughts and ideas, but a special species of judgements, judgements about matters of immediate and profound concern to us as embodied agents. We are also still trying to appreciate the implications of—and to go beyond—the realization that our very thoughts

seem to have a strong social character, that perhaps, as Hegel, Marx, Bakhtin, Vygotsky, and pragmatists think, we learn to converse in groups first and then to internalize our conversations into what we come to call thoughts. We are still struggling to appreciate the implications of idea formation as part and parcel of our *activities* as we go about encountering and solving problems in our individual and collective lives. As we come to grips with the presence of values in thinking and the social and activity characters of thought, we cannot but scrutinize a wide range of some of the most important ideas with which we have ordered our existence, concepts such as rationality, justice, and truth. We also have to scrutinize the ways in which we have organized ourselves: in nations, in representative democracies, in industrial societies, etc.

The task is staggering but necessary because otherwise we literally will not know what we say. Like Popper, Fish, and Rorty, we may support our value and policy arguments by appeal to what Eagleton calls *fideism*, the idea that “life is based on certain beliefs which are immune to rational scrutiny” (55). Like some poststructuralist critical pedagogues, we may have to wonder aloud whether we can make objective claims to the effect that slavery and child-labor and –prostitution are forms of oppression and abuse.

In the articles in this dissertation I have tackled very small aspects of this staggering task facing contemporary intellectuals. The first article focuses on the community characteristic of communication. The article argues that professional communication should explore how professionals arrive at their ideas, how they control who can have what types of ideas for what purposes, who can have oversight over their professional activities, and a host of other issues. In the post-9/11 world, I consider it to be of urgent importance to study how professional journalists, professional politicians, and professional bureaucrats arrive at their

ideas. In a sense, the continued functioning of democracy in our fragmented, industrial societies may depend on the understanding that may result from such a research project.

The second article explores one small aspect of visual communication, which is becoming increasingly important in modern societies: how stereotypes about a group can be countered or how knowledge about a group of people can be taught through photographs without resorting to manipulation. It turns out that photographs do not provide a shortcut to this knowledge. Viewing photographs is easier than, but cannot replace, studying the complicated histories of Iranians and the conflicting interpretations of their culture. But photographs can play important functions. Photographs can serve as a powerful tool to learn a great deal about the ideological commitments of the people who do the stereotyping. But photographs can also create a crisis in the viewers' ideas about a stereotyped group. That crisis is an important step in the long process of inquiry that the people doing the stereotyping must embark on to learn about the stereotyped group.

The issue of inquiry is taken up in the third article. Critical pedagogy is committed to the idea that students must embark on an *activity* of inquiry (praxis) that is meaningful to their lives; that is, for them to learn, they have to act in and to change their environment. Critical pedagogy argues that through this praxis, students will realize that they are in a dialectic relationship with their environment and that the world is not an unchanging given reality to which students must adapt themselves. But of course these pedagogical theories rest on a set of assumptions about the world, about human relations, about the goals of education, about the difference between knowledge and illusion, and many others. The third article attempts to defend against poststructuralist attacks on some of those assumptions. The concept of praxis, though it predates poststructuralism, is an improvement over the latter, and

in future articles, I intend to argue that composition studies would greatly benefit from a more nuanced understanding of the concepts of inquiry and praxis.

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